

Valery Medvedev

BARANKIN'S FANTASY WORLD





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Valery Medvedev
BARANKIN'S
FANTASY WORLD



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A cartoon illustration of a young boy with dark hair, smiling and floating in space. He is wearing a blue suit with white buttons and a red scarf tied around his neck. His arms are outstretched, and his legs are bent at the knees. The background is a light yellowish-green, filled with several stylized stars and planets of different colors (blue, green, orange).

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कोठी बाजार, होंडगावा ४६१-००१

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Illustrated by *Sergei Yukin*

Валерий Медведев

ФАНТАЗИИ БАРАНКИНА

Поэма в двух книгах

На английском языке

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Story One

BE A MAN, BARANKIN!



*Thirty-Six Events
in the Life of Yuri Barankin*

Part one
UP TO THE BOARD, BARANKIN!

Event No. 1

A DISGRACE TO THE WHOLE SCHOOL!

If Kostya Malinin and I hadn't managed to get two for geometry at the very beginning of the new school year, perhaps nothing so incredible and fantastic would have taken place in our lives, but get two we did, and that was why the very next day something incredible, fantastic, and even supernatural, you might say, happened to us!

In the break, immediately after the unfortunate event, our class prefect, Zina Fokina, came up to us and said: "Oh, Barankin and Malinin! What a disgrace! A disgrace to the whole school!" Then she gathered all the other girls round her, and the lot of them looked as if they were cooking up some kind of plot against us. Their conferring went on all through break right up to the bell for the next lesson.

Meanwhile Alik Novikov, our special photo correspondent, photographed me and Kostya and stuck our pictures up on the news-sheet in the *Humour and Satire* section with the caption "Two of a kind!"

After that Era Kuzyakina, the chief editor, gave us a withering look and hissed: "Just look how you've spoilt our lovely news-sheet!"

The news-sheet that Kuzyakina said we had spoilt was indeed a very fine one. It was adorned with all the colours of the rainbow, and in the most prominent place in bold letters right across were the words: *Make all your marks "excellent" or "very good"!*

To be quite honest our faces with their taciturn expressions of typical two-getters, did not fit in awfully well with the festive appearance of the news-sheet. I couldn't help writing Era a little note that said:

"Kuzyakina! I suggest removing our photographs to make the news-sheet lovely again. Or delete the bit about marks!"

I underscored the word "lovely" with two heavy lines and "delete the bit about marks" with three, but Era just tossed her head and wouldn't even look in my direction. Snooty thing!

THEY DON'T EVEN GIVE US A SECOND CHANCE...

As soon as the bell rang for the end of the last lesson, everyone stampeded for the door. I was about to push it open with my shoulder, when Era Kuzyakina barred my way.

"Sit down again, everyone! We're going to have a class meeting!" she shouted, adding spitefully: "On the subject of Barankin and Malinin!"

"Not a meeting," cried Zina Fokina. "A talk! A very serious talk! Back to your seats, everyone!"

You should have seen them! All the kids got angry and started banging their desks, cursing me and Kostya and shouting that they refused to stay on. Kostya and I yelled loudest of all, of course. What were things coming to? No sooner did you get a two, than there they were holding a class meeting, oh, alright, a "serious talk", which might be even worse, who could say? There had been nothing like that last year. What I mean is, Kostya and I had got twos last year as well, but no one had made such a fuss about it. They had ticked us off, of course, but not straightaway like this. They had given us a second chance, as they say. While these thoughts were running through my mind, Fokina our prefect and Kuzyakina the chief editor managed to



"quell the riot" and made everyone sit down in their places. When the racket gradually subsided and it was relatively quiet in the class, Zina Fokina opened the meeting, that is, the "serious talk" on the subject of me and my best friend.

It is most unpleasant for me to recall what Zina Fokina and our other class-mates said about me and Kostya at that meeting, but nevertheless I shall describe everything exactly as it was, without distorting a single word or adding anything of my own...

Event No. 3

JUST LIKE THE OPERA

When everyone had sat down and there was a brief lull in the class, Zina Fokina cried:

"What a dreadful thing to happen, everybody! The new school year has hardly begun, yet Barankin and Malinin have already managed to get twos!"

A terrible uproar broke out again, but you could make out the odd exclamation, of course.

"In that case I resign as chief editor of the news-sheet." (This was said by Era Kuzyakina.)

"But they promised they'd try harder!" (Mishka Yakovlev.)

"Lazy good-for-nothings! We took all that trouble with them last year, and now it's the same old thing all over again!" (Alik Novikov.)

"Call their parents to the school!" (Nina Semyonova.)

"They're a disgrace to our class!" (Ira Pukhova.)

"We'd all decided to work for 'excellents' and 'very goods', and now look what's happened!" (Ella Sinitsyna.)

"They should be ashamed of themselves!" (Nina and Ira together.)

"They should be thrown out of the school, that's what!" (Era Kuzyakina.)

I won't forget that, Era.

Then everyone began yelling in unison so loudly that Kostya and I simply couldn't make out who thought exactly what about us, although it was clear enough from the odd word here and there that me and Kostya Malinin were loafers, spongers and good-for-nothings. And again idle good-for-nothings, lazy-bones and loafers! And so on and so forth!

The thing that annoyed me and Kostya most was that Venka Smirnov was shouting louder than anyone else. Him of all people! Venka's marks last year had been even worse than Kostya's and mine. So I just couldn't stop myself shouting back.

"Why are you yelling your head off, Ginger?" I shouted at him. "If they'd called you up to answer, you'd have got a one, not a two! So shut your trap!"

"I'm not yelling against you, Barankin," Venka shouted at me. "I'm yelling for you! Listen, everyone. I say they shouldn't call us up to the board just after the holidays. They should let us get used to it all gradually..."

"Smirnov!" Zina Fokina shouted at Venka.

"And what's more," Venka went on shouting at the whole class, "I propose that for the first month no one should be asked any questions at all or called up to the board!"

"Well, you just shout that out separately," I yelled to Venka, "not with all the others!"

Then all the kids began to yell in unison again so loudly that you really couldn't make out a word and it was impossible to say who was for Venka's proposal and who was against it.

"Quiet, everyone," said Fokina. "Stop shouting. Let's hear what Barankin has to say for himself."

"What is there to say?" I said. "It's not our fault that Mikhail Mikhailych called us up to the board first. He should have asked one of the top boys, like Misha Yakovlev, then we'd have got good marks..."

Everyone began to snigger and make a noise, but Fokina said:

"You'd do better to follow Misha Yakovlev's example instead of joking about him."

"Who's he, prime minister or something?" I said just loud enough for everyone to hear.

The boys and girls started sniggering again. Zina Fokina tut-tutted and Era shook her head like a grown-up and said:

"What we want to know is when you and Malinin are going to turn your twos into decent marks?"

"You tell them, Malinin," I said to Kostya.

"Never a moment's peace!" said Malinin. "We'll turn your twos ... I mean, our twos into decent marks..."

"When?"

"When, Yuri?" Kostya asked me.

"You've got a head of your own, haven't you, Malinin?" cried Kuzyakina.

"Before the end of term," I said firmly, to settle the matter once and for all.

"Did you hear that, everyone? Our class has got to put up with the two no-good two-getters all the term!" Kuzyakina exclaimed in horror.

"Barankin!" announced Zina Fokina. "The class has decided that you must turn your twos into decent marks tomorrow."

"But tomorrow's Sunday!" I objected.

"Never mind. Do a bit of studying!" (Misha Yakovlev.)

"Serve them right!" (Alik Novikov.)

"Tie them to their desks!" (Era Kuzyakina.)

"But what if me and Kostya don't know how to solve the problem?"
(That was me.)

"I'll explain it to you!" (Misha Yakovlev.)

Me and Kostya exchanged glances and said nothing.

"Silence is a sign of consent!" said Zina Fokina. "So we've agreed on Sunday. Tomorrow morning Yakovlev will show you how to do it. Then you can come to the school and help us plant some trees in the yard."

"What?" Kostya and me shouted in unison. "Plant trees as well! But we'll ...we'll be tired after all that studying."

"Physical exercise is the best form of relaxation after mental exertion," said the chief editor of our news-sheet.

"Well, I never," I said. "It's just like the opera... *The tormented soul no sleep, no respite finds...*"

"Alik!" said our prefect. "Make sure they don't clear off..."

"They won't!" said Alik. "Smile, please. I won't stand no nonsense! You just try something and..." Alik aimed his camera at me and Kostya.
"With a caption..."

Event No. 4

(A Most Important One)

SAY I'M TIRED OF BEING A MAN?

The boys and girls left the classroom chatting to one another, but me and Kostya stayed sitting at our desks in silence. To tell the truth, we were absolutely flabbergasted. I have already told you that we'd had twos before, on more than one occasion, but our class-mates had never got at us right at the beginning of the school year, like they did that Saturday.

I thought there was only the two of us left and I was just about to share my gloomy thoughts with Kostya, when Zina Fokina suddenly came up to me.

"Yuri!" she said. (That was funny. She always called me by my surname.)
"Yuri. Be a man! Turn your two into a decent mark tomorrow! Will you?"

She was talking to me as if there was no one else there. As if my best friend Kostya Malinin wasn't sitting next to me.

"Fokinal!" I said in a very official sort of voice. "If I weren't so well brought up, I would tell you to mind your own business!"

Fokina (angrily). It's quite impossible to have a proper talk to you! Me (coolly). Then don't!

Fokina (even more angrily). Alright, I won't!

Me (even more coolly). But you are!

Fokina (a thousand times more angrily). Because I want you to be a man!

"But I am a man, aren't I?"

"No, Yuril!" Fokina said seriously. "I want you to be a man in the real sense!"

"But what if I'm tired... Tired of being a man! What then?"

"What do you mean—tired?" Fokina asked in surprise.

"Just that!" I shouted at her angrily. "Tired of it. Tired of being a man! Tired in the full sense of the word."

Zina Fokina was so taken aback, that she didn't know what to say. She stood there without a word, blinking rapidly. I was afraid she would start blubbering. But she didn't. Instead she seemed to change suddenly and said:

"Oh, Barankin! Really Barankin! That's the end, Barankin!" and went out of the classroom.

So I was left sitting at my desk in silence, thinking how tired I really was of being a man... Really tired. And I had a whole man's life ahead of me and a hard school year. And a hard Sunday tomorrow!

Event No. 5

SPADES ARE HANDED OUT... AND MISHA IS ABOUT TO APPEAR

Sunday arrived. The date and letters stood out in bright red on Dad's calendar. All the kids in our house were enjoying themselves. Going to the cinema or a football match, or just getting on with their own business, but there we were sitting in the yard on a bench waiting for Misha Yakovlev to do our geometry with him.

Having lessons on weekdays wasn't much fun, but swotting at the weekend when everyone else was enjoying themselves was sheer torment.

To make matters worse the weather was marvellous. Not a cloud in the sky, and as warm as summer.

That morning when I woke up and looked out of the window the sky was all cloudy. The wind was whistling outside, blowing the yellow leaves off the trees.

I was pleased. Perhaps we'll have hail the size of a pigeon's egg, I thought, and Misha will be afraid to go out and we won't do any geometry. Or perhaps the wind will bring snow or rain, instead of hail. Misha's the sort of person who would go out in snow or rain, of course, but it wouldn't be so bad to sit at home swotting up geometry if it were all wet outside. While I was thinking up all sorts of possibilities, matters took quite a different turn. The clouds first grew lighter, then disappeared altogether. By the time Kostya Malinin arrived the weather had definitely improved, and the sun was now shining in a beautiful clear sky. The air was still as could be. So still that the yellow leaves had stopped falling from the birch tree under which me and Kostya were sitting.

"Hey, you pair of mushrooms under the birch tree there!" came Mother's voice out of the window of our flat. "Are you going to do that geometry or not?"

It was the fifth or sixth time she had asked us that question.

"We're waiting for Yakovlev!"

"Can't you start without him?"

"No, we can't!" said me and Kostya in unison, looking away from the window and over the acacia bushes to the gate through which Misha would come.

But there was still no Misha. Instead of him we had odd glimpses of Alik Novikov who kept peeping out from behind a tree outside the gate. As usual he was loaded down with cameras and all sorts of photographic gear. I couldn't stand the sight of that snoop, of course, so I looked the other way.

"They call this Sunday!" I said, gritting my teeth.

At that moment Zina Fokina joined Alik; she was carrying four spades on her shoulder, a cardboard box under her arm and a butterfly net in her left hand.

Alik took a picture of Zina with the spades and they started walking towards us. I thought Alik would take the spades himself, but for some reason he didn't. Zina continued to carry all four of them, while Alik continued to clutch with both hands the camera that was hanging from his neck.



"Hey, there, Watch-the-Birdie," I said to Alik, when he and Zina came up to the bench. "You don't feel like having a shot at those spades, your Clickety-Clickship!"

"They're for you and Kostya to have a shot at," retorted Novikov, not in the least ruffled, pointing his camera at me and Kostya. "With the caption: *Prefect Z. Fokina handing out tools to her compatriots...*".

Zina Fokina propped the spades up against the back of the bench, while Alik Novikov clicked his camera.

"Yes," I said, examining the spades carefully. "It's just like the magazine *Round the Camp Fire...*"

"Why is that?" Fokina asked me.

"It's a picture with a puzzle," I explained.

"I know," said Alik. "Where is the handle of the spade?"

"Not quite," I said to Alik. "Where is the boy who's going to dig with the spade?"

"So you don't intend to plant trees in the school today, eh, Barankin!" cried Zina Fokina angrily.

"Oh, yes I do," I replied. "I intend to alright. Only I just don't know how long it will take to get round to it..."

"Be a man, Barankin!" said Zina.

She wanted to say something else to me and Kostya, but changed her mind, turned round and walked off without a word towards the school with a spade on her shoulder.

Alik Novikov had once more taken up his post behind the tree outside the gate. Kostya looked more miserable than ever and stared at the spades; he looked at them as if he were hypnotised, but I did just the opposite. I tried to behave as if the "tools" weren't there. Doing my utmost to appear nonchalant, I gazed up at the trees, never dreaming that before long those incredible, fantastic, one might even say, supernatural events were going to take place in our courtyard.

Event No. 6

SEVEN DAYS OFF EACH WEEK— THAT REALLY TOOK MY BREATH AWAY!

The sparrows were twittering away loudly in the bushes. Cheerful little flocks of them would swoop off the branches and fly from one tree to another, their patterns expanding and contracting in flight. It was as if they were all connected by pieces of elastic.

A swarm of midges flew gaily through the air just in front of my nose. Butterflies fluttered over the flower-bed. And little black ants ran over the bench where me and Kostya were sitting. One of them even climbed onto my knee and began sun-bathing.

"I bet every day is a Sunday for them!" I thought, gazing enviously at the sparrows. Without taking my eyes off the acacia bush, I began for what must have been the two-hundred-and-fiftieth time to compare my life with the life of the sparrows and arrived at a very sad conclusion. A single glance was enough to see that birds and insects had a completely carefree and really marvellous life: they didn't have to wait for anyone, or learn anything, or get sent anywhere, or get ticked off, or get given spades... They just lived their own lives and did exactly as they pleased.

All the while! All the days were in bright red letters. It was a holiday all the time! Seven days in a week—and each one of them a Sunday! Malinin and I had only one day in seven off, and that wasn't really off, was it? It was just supposed to be. Wouldn't it be great to live for even one day like those lucky ants, or the sparrows, or butterflies, so as not to hear all the orders that rain down on your poor head from dawn till dusk: wake up, get dressed, go there, bring this, take that, buy the other, sweep up, lend a hand, learn this! It was no better at school. As soon as I stuck my head round the classroom door, Fokina shouted:

"Be a man, Barankin! Don't fidget, don't cheat, don't be rude, don't be late!" And so on, and so forth.

Be a man at school.

Be a man outside.

Be a man at home.

But when could you relax?

Where could you get the time to relax? You could always make a bit of spare time, of course, but where could you find a nice place to relax so no one would stop you doing what you wanted? And it was then that I had the incredible idea I had been secretly turning over in my mind for a long time. What if I really did try and make it work! Today! This very moment! I might never have such a suitable moment again, or such a suitable opportunity and mood too. But first I should tell Kostya Malinin about it. Or perhaps I shouldn't? Yes. I would! I would tell him. And then we'd see what happened.

"Malinin!" I whispered. "Listen, Malinin!" I was almost choking with excitement. "Listen here."

Of course, if I hadn't had to do some extra geometry that Sunday and then go and plant trees in the school yard, I might never have told Kostya about my incredible, unheard-of plan, but the two adorning my mark book and the spade with its handle pointing towards me filled my cup of endurance to overflowing, as they say, and I decided to act.

Event No. 7

A UNIQUE SET OF INSTRUCTIONS

I took another look at the windows of our flat, the sky, the sparrows and the gate through which Misha Yakovlev was about to appear and said in a really excited voice:

"You know what my mother says, Kostya?"

"No, what?" asked Kostya.

"My mother says that if you really want to you can turn a snub nose into an aquiline one."

"An aquiline one?" repeated Kostya. He could not understand why I was saying all this, and stared at the words chalked on the wall of our house that said:

BARANKIN IS A CRACKPOT

"Yes, an aquiline one," I asserted. "Only you must really want to."

Malinin stopped looking at the fence and turned his gaze doubtfully to my nose.

My profile was the exact opposite of aquiline. I was snub-nosed. As my mother put it, so snub-nosed, that you could almost see what I was thinking by looking up my nostrils.

"Why do you go around with a nose like that, if you can change it into an aquiline one?" asked Kostya Malinin.

"I'm not talking about noses, idiot!"

"What are you talking about then?" Kostya still hadn't caught on.

"I'm saying that if a person really wanted to he could turn into a sparrow, for example..."

"But why on earth should he want to turn into a sparrow, for example?" asked Kostya Malinin, looking at me as if I was not quite right in the head.

"What do you mean—why? If we turned into sparrows we could at least spend one Sunday in a humane fashion!"

"In a humane fashion?" asked Malinin in astonishment.

"That means properly," I explained. "We'll have a proper day off and take a rest from geometry, and Misha Yakovlev ... and the rest of it. Of course, if you're not tired of being a man you needn't turn into anything—just sit and wait for Misha..."

"Not tired? I'm very tired indeed of being a man!" said Kostya. "Maybe even more than you."

"That's more like it! There speaks a true friend."

And I began even more excitedly to describe to Kostya Malinin the marvellous life free of worry and care that I imagined was awaiting us if we could somehow manage to turn into sparrows.

"That's great," said Kostya. "Breathe in—breathe out!"

"Course it is," I said.

"Just a minute!" said Kostya. "How are we going to turn into sparrows? By what method?"

"Haven't you ever read in fairy tales: 'Ivan struck the ground and turned into a swift-winged eagle... Then he did strike the ground again and became a...'"

"Listen, Yuri," Kostya Malinin said. "Is it really necessary to strike the ground?"

"No, not really," I said. "You can manage by just wanting it enough and knowing the magic words..."

"But where can we find the magic words? In an old fairy tale?"

"No need. I've invented some myself. Look." I handed Kostya a note-book, a note-book that nobody except me had ever seen.

"How to turn from a man into a sparrow by the Barankin method. Instructions." Kostya read out in a piercing whisper the words on the cover of the note-book and turned to the first page.

Event No. 8

"NO MORE SCHOOL, I WANT TO FLY LIKE A SPARROW IN THE SKY!"

"*No more school, I want to fly like a sparrow in the sky! What's that? Poetry?*" Kostya asked me.

"No, it's a spell. A rhyming spell..." I explained. "They always have them in fairy tales. Have you read the *Snow Queen*? Snip-snap-snur-re-purre-baselurre..."

"There's one thing I know for sure, a sparrow's life is free of care! Here I go, here I go! The rest of it is illegible..."

"What's illegible about it?" I said. "Here I go! Here I go! Changing into a sparrow!"

"That sounds great!" said Kostya.

"It took me all night," I said in a whisper so that no one could hear us.

"Then why are we wasting time?" Malinin cried. "Let's do it quickly before Misha Yakovlev comes."

"You are an idiot, Malinin! Do it quickly indeed! It may not work, but you go crowing about it for everyone to hear."

"So what?"

"So this. It's highly confidential, you might say, never been done before. If anyone hears us talking about it, they'll laugh their heads off if it doesn't work."

"But you said it would work, if we had the magic words and really wanted to!" whispered Kostya.

"Of course it will, if we really want to! But what does that mean—really want to? That's the tricky bit!" I whispered back. "Have you ever really wanted something, Kostya?"

"I don't know," replied Kostya quietly.

"There you are! And you say do it quickly! It's not like working a two up to a three. It's a question of turning two human beings into sparrows. That's what it is."

"Why into sparrows? I think butterflies would be easier."

"Why butterflies? Butterflies are insects, but sparrows are birds. We learnt about sparrows in our last lesson. But you were reading some other book, weren't you?"

"Yes, I didn't hear anything about sparrows."

"Well, I did. Nina Nikolayevna spent a whole lesson telling us about sparrows. And you know what a wonderful time they have?"

"Alright, let it be sparrows!" Kostya Malinin conceded. "I was the raven in the *Snow Queen* by our amateur dramatic group, so it will be easy for me to turn into a sparrow. Let's get a move on!"

"Don't be in such a hurry! We must do a spot of training first," I said, climbing up onto the bench. Squatting down like a sparrow, I hunched my head into my shoulders and folded my arms behind my back like wings.

"Just right!" said Kostya, copying all my movements. "Cheep-cheep!"

"None of that!" I said. "We're supposed to be training. There's no need to start chirping before you have to. Let's practice hopping like sparrows."

Squatting on our heels, we started hopping along the bench and almost fell off.

"It's hard!" said Kostya, flapping his arms like wings to keep his balance.

"Never mind," I reassured him. "It'll be easier to hop when we are real sparrows."

Kostya wanted to do a bit more hopping, but I told him our training session was over and we must get on with the most important thing, turning Malinin and Barankin into sparrows.

"Don't move!" I ordered Kostya Malinin.

"Right!"

"Concentrate hard!"

"Right!" Kostya concentrated.

"When I give the word just imagine, in your mind's eye, as they say, that you are turning into a sparrow. Get it?"

"Right!"

"In that case, prepare to turn from a human being into a sparrow."

"Right!"

"Ready, steady, go!"

"Right!"

I closed my eyes tightly, braced myself and, repeating the spell to myself, began to imagine, in my mind's eye, that I was turning into a sparrow, although I doubted that I had the desire and real power required for such an unheard-of, unseen and, you could say, supernatural task...

Part two

CHIRP, CHIRP! EVERYTHING'S FINE!

Event No. 9

YOU CAN IF YOU REALLY WANT TO...

To be quite honest I often had ideas and fantasies that were hard to put into practice.

Once, for example, I thought of inventing a machine that could switch off a person's voice at a distance. I calculated that the device (I called it the QUIETOPHONE BIO-1—the Barankin-system voice extinguisher) would work like this: say a teacher was telling us something boring in a lesson, thereby preventing me, Barankin, from thinking about something interesting; I would press the switch on my quietophone and the teacher's voice would be extinguished. Those who didn't have such a machine would continue to listen, but I could get on quietly with anything I liked...

Another example: I would go into the classroom in the morning. Zina Fokina would rush up and begin ticking me off; I would calmly press the lever in my pocket and switch off Fokina's voice for the rest of the day...

I wanted to invent such a machine, but never got further than the name, perhaps because I didn't want to enough?

Or last year, on the very last day of the summer holidays, just before I went to bed, I wanted terribly to be grown up, only not in fifteen

or twenty years time like normal people but the very next day. Like this: I would go to bed as a boy, and when I woke up next morning I would be grown up with a moustache and wouldn't need to go to school. I wanted it so badly that I dreamt about it all night. On the first of September I woke up bright and early, of course. But I was lying in bed just the same as ever, with no moustache, and I had to get up for school...

There were other things I wanted badly too, but none of them as strongly as to turn from a human being into a sparrow.

I sat on the bench without moving, concentrating hard and not thinking about anything else, with one thing only in my head: "How can I turn into a sparrow as quickly as possible." I longed for that even more than I had longed for the beginning of the summer holidays. And the fact that any minute now Misha Yakovlev would appear in our yard merely made my longing ten times stronger.

At first I sat on the bench the way ordinary people sit and didn't feel anything in particular. I was still having all sorts of unpleasant human thoughts about bad marks, and geometry and Misha Yakovlev, but I tried to forget about all that. I believed that now I had definitely decided to turn into a sparrow I should think about sparrow things. After a while I noticed that instead of human thoughts I was beginning to have non-human ones. For example, I suddenly wanted to twitter a bit of sparrow talk.

Then all sorts of non-human urges began to emerge of their own accord: first I felt like taking off from the bench and having a little fly around, then perching on top of the birch tree, then resting for a bit in the bird-box...

And when I tried to think about something human again as usual, I found to my great surprise that I couldn't. Geometry seemed a very stupid occupation. The bad mark had for some reason completely ceased to worry me and stopped being important, and I now saw Misha Yakovlev not as the brainy wonder known to the whole school, but as a poor clumsy creature who couldn't even do such a simple thing as fly about in the sky.

At that moment I felt a tingling sensation in my legs. It became stronger and stronger. Then it spread to my back, my arms and my whole body. Suddenly and quite unexpectedly I felt like pecking some oats. Yes, oats of all things! Raw, uncrushed grains lying on the ground in the dust! Lots and lots of them, so I could peck away to my heart's content!

I sat on the bench, eyes closed, with this pins and needles sensation running all over my body like school-kids tearing about in the mid-morning break, while I sat there thinking: "I wonder what this tingling and the oats mean? I know about pins and needles. My legs must have got stiff. But what about the oats?"

I was never very keen on the porridge that Mum made with milk and jam at home. Why should I suddenly want to eat raw oats? I was a human being, not a horse! So I sat there racking my brains, but I couldn't explain anything to myself, because my eyes were closed tight, and that made it all dark and fuzzy in my head.

"Maybe something's happened to me?" I thought. So I decided to take a good look at myself.

Holding my breath I opened my eyes a fraction and peered down at my legs. Instead of feet in a pair of shoes I saw sparrow's claws. With these claws I was perching on the bench like a real sparrow. I opened my eyes a little wider and saw that I had wings instead of arms. Then I opened my eyes wider still, turned my head and saw a tail sticking out behind me. Well, I never! I had turned into a sparrow after all!

I was a sparrow! I wasn't Barankin any more! I was a real honest-to-goodness sparrow!

So that was why I had suddenly wanted some oats. Oats is the favourite food of horses and sparrows. Now I understood everything. No, not everything. What did it mean? It meant that mother was right. It meant that if you *really* wanted, you could do anything you liked!

What a discovery! A discovery like this should be chirped out to the whole yard. And not only the yard, the whole city, the whole world!

I spread my wings! I puffed out my chest! I turned to Kostya Malinin, and froze open-beaked in dismay.

My dear friend Kostya Malinin was still sitting on the bench as an ordinary human being. He hadn't managed to turn into a sparrow. How about that!

Event No. 10

WHAT'S THAT IN SPARROW LANGUAGE?

Malinin hadn't managed to turn into a sparrow!

He was concentrating hard and frowning, patting himself with his hands all the time and whispering almost inaudibly: "Here I go! Here I go!

Turning into a sparrow!" But it was no good. And to think he had been hurrying me up and shouting for everyone to hear: "Turn into a sparrow quickly! Get a move on! Right now!" Now here he was, still the same old Malinin. Only a bit redder in the face, and nothing else.

"What's the mater, Malinin?" I called out to him. "Why haven't you turned into a sparrow?"

But instead of these words what came out of my mouth was a string of chirps: "Tweet-tweet! Chirrup-chirrup! Twitter-twitter!"

Kostya turned his head, looked in my direction and his eyes almost popped out of his head.

"Barankin!" he gasped. "Is that you, Barankin?"

"Twit-twit! Twat-twat!" I replied in sparrow language, which means: "Of course it is! Don't you recognise me?"

Having convinced himself that I was not lying and that I really was no longer myself, but a real live sparrow, Malinin turned an even deeper shade of red, probably from envy, and almost burst into tears.

"How did you manage it?" he asked, blinking rapidly.

"Chirrup-birrup! Chirp-birp!" (Nothing to it! Chirp! Chirp! Hey presto and there you are!)

Then Kostya and I had the following conversation in two different languages.

K o s t y a (with tears in his eyes). So you managed it. That's great. But why can't I do it too?

M e. Twitter-twatter! Twup, twup! (How do I know!) Twitter-twoddle-twump! (Perhaps you didn't want to enough.)

K o s t y a. What are you twitting at me for? Speak like a human being!

M e. Chirrp! Chip-chip-chuppety-chup! (How can I speak like a human being, if I'm a sparrow!) Chump! Chu-chu-chump!

K o s t y a. Who are you calling a chump!

I wasn't calling him a chump at all. I had simply said: "Don't give up, Malinin. Have another try!"

Kostya began to moan at me for turning into a sparrow without waiting for him, but I didn't chirp anything back. I didn't like it either. We had agreed together, the two of us, to turn into sparrows and now look what had happened. Of course, it wasn't as much fun being a sparrow on your own as with someone else.

I flapped my wings, flew up, perched on the fence in high dudgeon and turned my back on Kostya Malinin. At that very moment who should appear on his bicycle round the corner but Misha Yakovlev.



I clutched my head with my wings. We'd had it! Now Malinin would never make it.

"Here I go! Here I go! Turning into a sparrow!" I heard the desperate voice of Kostya Malinin.

Without taking my eyes off Misha Yakovlev, I called to Kostya from the fence:

"Twitter, twatter! Twit, twit, twit!" (It's too late! Misha's coming on his bicycle! He'll take you up to do your geometry!)

While I was twittering away I saw Misha ride into the yard up to the bench where poor old Kostya was sitting. That is, where he should have been sitting... I say "should have been", because by the time Misha Yakovlev skidded up to the bench, there was no Kostya in sight. In his place on the bench was a sparrow with legs bent and, judging from everything, that sparrow was none other than the former Kostya Malinin. So just as I had almost given up all hope, Kostya Malinin had gone and turned into a sparrow at his second, or perhaps even third try. Anyway it didn't matter how many tries, only that he had made it.

"Kostya," called Misha, getting off his bike. "Malinin! Where are you hiding? That's funny! I could swear I saw him on this bench. I did see him. There are his maths books!"

Misha picked up the maths books, not paying the slightest attention to the sparrow nearby (who was none other than Kostya Malinin himself — what a laugh!), looked around the yard, then glanced up at our window where my mother's head appeared.

"Hello, Misha!" said mother. "Where are Yuri and Kostya?"

"That's just what I was going to ask you!" said Yakovlev. "Their maths books and spades are on the bench, but there's no sign of them..."

"The little devils!" said mother. "They've probably gone outside... Come up and wait for them here, Misha. They won't be long."

Misha put Kostya's books on his saddle and disappeared into the house, then I flew down from the fence onto the bench beside Kostya Malinin.

"Chirr-chick! Chir-chick! Chuck-chuck-chuck!" I said to Kostya. (Good lad, Malinin. So you made it!)

To which Kostya chirped back:

"Twitti-twitti?" (Did I really?)

"Twitti!" I said. "Twirr-twirrup! Chi-chi-chi!" (Yes, you did. Open your eyes and you'll see!)

And Kostya opened his big blue eyes, like a girl's. His eyes were still blue! A sparrow with blue eyes! Marvellous! He stood on his legs,

swaying slightly and using his tail to keep his balance, and couldn't get over his amazement.

I wiped the sweat off my brow with my wing and said:

"Everything's okay!" (Chphew!)

"Chphew!" (Everything's fine!) said Kostya Malinin, also wiping his brow with his wing.

We hugged each other and began hopping and flying round the bench with delight.

Event No. 11

AN ENCOUNTER WITH LANKY LEGS

"We'll stuff ourselves with oats," I said to Kostya Malinin, "then nip off somewhere! Fly away!"

"Where to?"

"Wherever we like. Now we've turned into sparrows we can do whatever we want." I raised a wing, stretched a leg and recited dramatically: *"For we are birds as free as air. 'Tis time, oh brother, 'tis time! To fly to a distant clime!"* In other words, we'll go where the fancy takes us! What a life!

Malinin chortled.

"Hey, old cha-chap!" he said. "You've turned into a sparrow, but you've got a snub-nosed beak. What a jo-jo-joke!"

"It's a lie!"

"No, it 'tis-'tis, 'tisn't."

"And you've still got blue eyes like a girl! Ch-chump! Tw-twit!"

I flew down from the bench and looked at myself in a puddle. My beak really was snub-nosed, and in general I looked a bit of a mess, with feathers sticking out all over the place and an untidy tuft on my head. Kostya Malinin looked quite different: he had a smart white breast with a tie, and was all clean and tidy, with nice smooth feathers as if he had just been to the hairdresser's.

Still, I didn't let this upset me unduly. Even as a human, I had never been particularly good-looking or well-groomed. So I was snub-beaked and dishevelled, what of it?

That was beside the point. The point was that I was a *sparrow* and that now nothing and nobody could dampen my high spirits. I really did feel on top of the world! And why shouldn't I? My head was

completely empty—no cares, no thoughts, no worries. And it would be like that all day! All day! What a fabulous day! I should say! Hooray, hooray! Too fabulous to be true!

I drank some rain-water and patted my reflection with my wing, splashing Kostya Malinin who was hopping along the other side of the puddle.

"How are things, old cha-cha-chap?"

"Fabulous!" chirped Malinin, splashing me back.

"What did I tell you? And you wanted us to be butterflies! Let's have a swim."

"It's too cold! Let's look for some oats instead. I want something to eat, tweet, tweet."

It turned out to be no easy matter finding oats in our yard. We found hempseed, melon seeds and sunflower seeds, but no sign of any oats.

"Who are you pushing?" came Kostya's voice from behind me. "Yuri He pulled a feather out of my tail. The old rascal!"

I turned round and saw Kostya Malinin being chased across the grass by a tough-looking sparrow without a tail. "I was hopping about and saw some oats lying in the grass. So I bent down, and someone pulled a feather out of my tail! What a nerve!" cheeped Kostya, taking refuge behind my back with a hop, skip and jump.

"Leave that little sparrow alone, you big bully," I said, hopping up to the tough-looking sparrow. "What do you think you're doing, spoiling people's day off?"

"I don't think nothing! Why's that little beggar after my oats? Comes to a strange yard and starts throwing his weight around! Don't remember seeing you lot here before."

I wanted to tell the sparrow exactly why he could not have seen us here before, but old Lanky Legs would not listen to me. He hopped up and gave me a good thump on the chest with his wing without saying a word. Then he jumped back a pace and stood with his legs apart and his wings spread out in a threatening pose.

I did not lose my head. I too spread out my wings like a fan, stuck up my tail and hopped right up to Lanky Legs ready to trip him up. The ordinary human trip up. The sparrow didn't know that trick, of course, and although he was a good head taller than me, it sent him flying. He lay on his back, legs in the air, without moving. He was probably thinking that now me and Kostya would give him a good thrashing. For some reason I began to feel sorry for him.

"Get up, you there, without the tail!" I said. "We don't kill a person lying down! You just scram... No, wait, you can stay here! We'll treat you to some oats. Where are the oats, Kostya?"

"Here in the grass. Here's a grain and there's another one."

But Lanky Legs took no notice of what I said. He got up without a word, shook himself and hopped away fearfully.

"Twit!" Malinin shouted after him, waving his tail.

"Twit yourself!" I said to Kostya, clutching a golden grain of oats in my claw. "Couldn't pay him back!"

My spirits rose again, and Kostya Malinin recovered his good mood.

"You trip-pip-piped him up a beauty!" said Kostya, digging a grain of oats out of the grass.

My mouth began watering at the mere sight of these delicious grains. I sharpened my beak on a stone and squeezed the grain hard with my claw. I would crush it and gobble it up straightaway!

"A cat!" I heard Kostya Malinin's warning cry behind me and turned round...

Event No. 12

MUSKA THE CAT TRIES TO EAT ME

Turning round I saw Kostya Malinin hanging head downwards from a branch of the acacia tree, flapping his wings and crying like mad:

"A cat! There's a cat behind you!"

I turned my head in the opposite direction. There was a cat, an ordinary cat, coming towards me from the rubbish tip. Only I couldn't see what was so terrible about that and why Kostya was making such a fuss, as if a tiger had suddenly appeared in the yard. He was a bit of a nut case, that Malinin. If I'd known he would be such a nervy sparrow I'd never have got mixed up with him.

"Yuril! Fly away quick!" Kostya Malinin went on flapping about on his branch.

The cat came up closer and stopped. I hopped up sideways to it and suddenly recognised the unfamiliar cat as mother's beloved puss Muska. While I had been sitting on the bench as a human being, she had jumped down from the window ledge, come up to me and started rubbing herself against my leg. I had shooed her away so she would not disturb me.

"Hi, Muska!" I chirped delightedly. "Guess who I am? Don't you recognise your master, eh? Don't be frightened, come here, I won't eat you! It's me! Silly old puss. And that's Kostya Malinin up there in the tree. Don't you recognise him either? Come down, Kostya, don't be afraid. It's only Muska!"

"You're crazy!" Malinin started yelling on the acacia tree again. "She'll eat you!"

"Me? Her master? You're the one who's crazy!"

No sooner were the words out of my mouth than something heavy and rumbling pounced on me from behind and crushed me to the ground. I just had time to think "Muska" as I gave a great push and flew up towards the acacia tree where Malinin was still yelling and squawking on the branches. I sped like a stone out of a catapult, nearly knocking my best friend off his perch. Thank goodness he held on fast! I managed to grab hold of the branch. From there I looked down. Muska was waving her tail in the grass, yowling angrily.

A few small feathers clawed out of my side floated slowly through the air like little fish in an aquarium.

"I t-told you so!" Kostya Malinin gloated gleefully.

"Well, I never!" chirped I. "Our dear old Muska..."

"Dear old Muska, indeed. You're lucky to be in one piece..."

"Barankin has never run away from a cat!"

"Brave lad! Chirping merrily: 'Come here, I won't eat you, silly! Silly twit, yourself. Had you forgotten that cats eat sparrows?'"

"No," I said. "I'm just not used to being a sparrow."

"Not used to being a sparrow! Then why did I get used to it straightaway?" said Kostya. "What could I have told your mother, if your own cat had eaten you?"

I imagined for a moment what would have happened if I hadn't managed to slip out of Muska's paws, and began to feel a bit queasy. To be honest, I felt quite terrified, although the danger was past and there was nothing to fear, but all the same my feathers stood on end.

"What's the matter with you?" Kostya asked me. "You're all ji-ji-jittery!"

"It's nothing... I feel hot!" I said, fanning myself with my wing.

Kostya began telling me off again, so I tucked my head under my wing, but at that very moment someone jabbed me in the side with something sharp.

WHAT GRANDMAS TWITTER ABOUT

I peeped out from under my wing and saw an old, bald sparrow sitting beside me.

"Hey, young'un," the old sparrow said to me. "I've been watching you from the birch tree. Are you really cra-cra-crackers or just pretending?"

"What's that got to do with you?"

"Don't be rude to your elders."

"I'm not being rude. I've just got that sort of voice."

To get rid of the old sparrow, I tucked my head under my wing again, but the old bird pecked me again very painfully in the neck.

"Pay attention when your elders are talking to you! You should respect-peck-peck grown-ups. Don't snig-snig-snigger!"

"I'm not sniggering!"

"What were you twittering about cats? How can a sparrow be friends with a cat? You, youngsters! Whatever do your parents teach you?"

The old sparrow rolled his eyes and began twittering about how hard-working, well-behaved and clever youngsters had been in his day, and how they had never sniggered, whereas now they did nothing but snigger.

Was it really worth turning into sparrows only to listen to this chee-chee-cheap lecturing?

"Whose children are you, eh?" the old sparrow asked me.

"Nobody's!" I replied, flying off the branch.

"Don't snig-snig-snigger!" said Kostya, flapping his wings. "Funny old cha-cha-chap!"

We circled round the yard, looking for a tree with no sparrows on it. Although I was now a sparrow myself, I suddenly felt that I wanted to keep my distance from them. My encounter with the tough-looking sparrow and the old sparrow had not made a very pleasant impression upon me. But one thing upset me most of all: it was now about half-an-hour since we had turned into sparrows, but our sparrow life was still not going smoothly, in fact everything was quite different from what I had expected. Time was passing... And tomorrow there was school again...

I didn't say anything to Kostya Malinin, of course. After all, we still had a whole day to go. Things would settle down and it would be alright. The main thing was not to give up hope.

After flying around for a bit, Kostya and I perched on a tree. There was not a single sparrow on it.

The branch on which we perched was facing the sun. And the sun was as warm as in summer.

Drawing my head into my shoulders happily, I was just about to tuck it under my wing, when something gave a nasty whistle above my ear. Then there was a smacking sound, and some leaves fell down. What on earth was that? What was up? I opened my eyes and looked down.

Event No. 14

A LONG-RANGE CATAPULT WITH A TELESCOPIC SIGHT

By the bench where Kostya and I had just been sitting was my neighbour, the tow-haired Venka Smirnov, his face contorted into a horrid grimace. He was holding a catapult with a telescopic sight. I recognised the catapult at once. Nobody could make those long-range catapults as well as me. Venka's catapult had also been manufactured by me at his personal request.

Venka was looking at me through the telescopic sight. I looked back at Venka. "Bother! Missed it!" I could read on his face. Not only had I almost been devoured by a cat, now I was being shot at by a catapult made by my own fair hand!

"Just you wait, Venka!" I chirped from a tree. "Just you wait, goldilocks! When I turn back into a human being, I'll teach you to shoot at me with a catapult!"

Taking no notice of my twittering, Venka bent down and began to look for a stone. Kostya and I exchanged scared glances and shot off the tree simultaneously without a word. I decided to fly a good distance away from our yard, Muska the Cat, tow-haired Venka with his catapult, and all those pugnacious and inhospitable sparrows. We flew through one courtyard after another. From the height at which we were flying, it was clear that there were far more cats in our town than I had ever imagined when I was human. There were also a lot of boys with catapults. This discovery disconcerted me. From my limited experience as a sparrow I had already learnt that an encounter with a catapult or a cat could end very nastily indeed for a sparrow. Malinin had also begun to irritate



me terribly for some reason. He was trailing along behind, never keeping up and flying in a way that suggested he was doing me a favour.

"Why do you keep lag-gag-gagging behind?" I lost my patience and shouted angrily as Kostya. "Slow-coach!"

"I'm tired!"

"Tired! We've only flown four blocks, and he's tired!"



"I'm not tired of flying. I'm tired of being a sparrow!"

"Listen to him! He's only been a sparrow for half-an-hour and he's already had enough of it. Sparrows have to be sparrows all their lives! If I'd known, I'd never have brought you with me!"

I spied a small square and glided down.

"Now you can have a rest!" I said to Kostya when he landed on the branch after me.

Kostya raised his wing and was just about to tuck his head under it, when a voice cried out above us:

"So that's where they are, the lazy lot! I sent them out for straw, and they go basking in the sun! Never listen to their mother!"

Event No. 15

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SONS DISOWN THEIR MOTHER

I looked up and saw a fat mother sparrow perched on a neighbouring birch tree. It was she who had called us her sons.

"Why don't you say something? Why don't you answer your poor mother?"

"I don't understand," Kostya whispered to me. "Why is she calling herself our mother?"

"What is there to understand? She must have taken us for her fledglings."

"But do we really look like them?"

"How should I know..."

"Why are you hiding from your poor mother?" the fat sparrow went on twittering. "Don't be afraid! Come here. I'll let you off this time."

"Perhaps we really do look like her sons, eh?"

"Could be."

"Oh, my goodness, this would happen! Excuse me, missus!" Kostya piped up. "We're not hiding from anybody, and we've never seen you before in our lives!"

"What's that you say? Missus!" screeched the fat sparrow. "Did you hear what they called their poor mother!"

The flock of sparrows in the next tree twittered angrily, and the fat sparrow was so furious that she pecked Kostya Malinin in the neck.

Kostya gave a howl.

"Auntyl" I came to my friend's defence. "We're not your children, honestly. Cross my heart and hope to die."

"Listen to that, everybody, this one disowns his own mother too," screeched the fat sparrow, hopping up and down on the branch and flapping her wings.

The sparrows started ticking me and Kostya off even more loudly, and our "mother" gave us such a box on the ears that the feathers flew out of us as if we were pillows. So Malinin and I were forced to take back what we had said and call her "mother".

"That's better!" the fat sparrow calmed down at once. "Now off we go, boys! To have a nest-building lesson!"

"To have a lesson?" me and Kostya wailed in unison.

Event No. 16

ME AND KOSTYA HAVE A NEST-BUILDING LESSON

"What's the matter, have you forgotten?" said the sparrow. "Yesterday your mum taught you how to build a nest, and today you're going to do it on your own!"

"Hear that?" Kostya chirped quietly. "Why didn't you tell me that sparrows have lessons too?"

"How could I know?"

"Then why did you say that sparrows have a wonderful time?"

"It wasn't me, it was Nina Nikolayevna who said that," I retorted. "Don't go on at me!"

"You do as you like, but I'm not going to learn how to build a nest!" chirped Kostya.

"Who said he's not going to learn to build a nest?" the fat sparrow asked threateningly, flying up to me and Kostya.

"It wasn't him, it was me!" I chirped, shielding Kostya. "And fighting's not educational!"

"What! Where did you pick up words like that?"

The fat sparrow gave me a hefty peck in the back and drove me and Kostya to the next tree where a pile of straw, horse-hair and other building materials was ready.

"This is how we build a nest..." chirped the fat sparrow. "We take

a nice piece of straw in our beaks and twist it into a circle... Repeat after me, boys!"

"We take a nice piece of straw in our beaks," me and Kostya chirped in unison, "and twist it into a circle..."

The lesson had begun. Me and Kostya each took a piece of straw in disgust, not looking at each other.

"I wonder if sparrows have a break between lessons," I thought miserably, twisting the piece of straw into a circle as the sparrow had taught us.

"And after that..." the sparrow continued, deftly weaving in the pieces of straw and pressing them down with her breast. "And after that..."

But what you did "after that" we were never to learn, because at that moment a hefty ginger sparrow thumped down on us out of the sky. The branch on which we were sitting shook under his weight.

"Your dad's come home! Our dear old Cheeky! Cheeky's back!" the sparrow cried joyfully, jumping up and down and making the branch bend even more.

Me and Kostya opened our beaks in amazement, dropped the pieces of straw and gaped at the ginger sparrow Cheeky who, according to his plump mate, was none other than our father.

Event No. 17

THE FIGHT FOR THE BIRD-HOUSE

"Come on, my lads! Off we go, my hearties!" cried the ginger sparrow, flapping his fat legs and sides with his wings. "The martins are flying south. Leaving their bird-house. And it's a smashing one!"

"A luv-uv-uvly one!" his mate chirruped joyfully. "I've always dreamed of having a bird-house!"

"Yes! A real bird-house. Only we've got to get hold of it first. I'm afraid we'll have to fight for it. So off we fly, fly, fly! In the sky, sky, sky!"

"Off we fly, fly, fly!" I echoed, having decided that it would be better to fight for a bird-house than learn to build a nest.

"Perhaps we needn't fight... Perhaps it would be better to learn how to bui-build a nest!" Kostya Malinin twittered timidly.

"Don't contradict your elders, young whippersnapper! I'd like to see what you say next winter when it's freezing cold!"

"That's right!" I agreed with Cheeky.

The sparrow flew off the branch, gave me and Kostya a shove with his wing and sped off, chirping wildly and showing us the way. The fat sparrow brought up the rear, and whenever me and Kostya began to lag behind she would drive us on with her sharp beak stepping up the pace.

"Get a move on there! Don't lag behind! Hurry up!" jabbered Cheeky, glancing back from time to time.

"I'll never forgive you for this, Yuri!" Kostya said to me as we were flying. "If you've decided to stay a sparrow for the rest of your life, go and fight for your bird-house. But count me out. I'll choose the right moment and slip off! Fly away!"

"Quiet, idiot, or you'll spoil everything! There's no escaping from old Cheeky here at the moment!"

"Then what can we do? I haven't got the strength to go on being a sparrow."

"What can we do? Slip off somewhere along the way, of course! I'll give the signal! You'll come to no harm with Barankin!"

"No harm! Why, you're just the one to get a person into trouble!" groaned Kostya Malinin.

And he turned out to be right. He and I very nearly did get into real trouble, and all because of me. Why on earth did I agree to fight for that wretched bird-house?

We didn't manage to slip off along the way, of course. Cheeky and his mate watched us closely all the time and didn't let us lag behind an inch. Things were turning out worse than I had expected. If we got mixed up in a fight against our wishes, I could probably look after myself, but Kostya would never be able to hold his own. He wasn't any good at fighting on the ground never mind in the air against sparrows.

I hardly had time to think this when I heard the most awful chirping and twittering and our "family" came upon a whole flock of sparrows fighting in a garden for the bird-house of which our "parents" were dreaming.

I don't know how it happened, but me and Kostya suddenly found ourselves right in the thick of the scrapping, quite out of our parents' sight. On all sides of us, above and below, strange sparrows we had never seen before were diving at one another, chirruping wildly.

It was good that Kostya Malinin had the sense to cling onto my tail with his beak, or we would probably have lost each other in the fray.

It was no easy matter to tow Kostya along and fight off the other sparrows, of course, but I managed pretty well to evade the ones that were charging me by showering them with all sorts of threats and curses. It was a good thing I had just read a book on aerobatics. This came in very handy in the battle with the sparrows...

I zoomed up, just as the book said, turned on my wing, shot up again, went into a spin and finally managed to break out of sparrow encirclement by hedge-hopping. Seeing that the danger was past, Kostya let go of my tail, and we made off as fast as we could to get away from those wretched sparrows.

"Give it to them, lads!" came some sparrow voices behind us.

I looked round and saw that four sparrows had broken away from the scuffling mass and set off in pursuit...

Event No. 18

KOSTYA MALININ IS SICK OF TWEETING

"Won't there ever be an end to all this?" groaned Malinin, putting on a spurt.

"Those two there were chirping the loudest!" someone cried from behind.

The pursuing sparrows started attacking us from the rear.

"Steady on, lads! We were only chirr-rruping!" I tried to reason with them.

"What did you come flying over here for then?"

"Nothing. Just to have a look!"

"Have a look, eh? We'll teach you alright! We'll knock the living daylights out of you, we will!"

The sparrows started to overtake us and probably would have given us a thrashing and knocked the living daylights out of us, if I hadn't made use of the very crafty aeronautical strategem that pilots call a roll. Choosing an opportune moment, I let my pursuers get close to me, then all of a sudden wheeled over on my back in the air and lashed out at the nearest sparrow with my legs—the sparrow flew off and crashed into a fence.

"Ha, ha!" I cried in a ferocious voice. "Barankin's on the war-path! Beware!"

I lashed out at another and he flew away too. And so I went on wheeling, shouting and lashing out until all our pursuers had fled for dear life. The enemy, who knew nothing about aerobatics, of course, were taken aback, completely outmanoeuvred, and gradually fell behind.

Taking advantage of their disarray we stepped up our speed, disappeared behind some trees and collapsed exhaustedly on the first roof we saw.

I was steaming like mad and my heart was thumping like the lid of a kettle on the boil.

"You do as you like, of course," gasped Kostya, trying to get his breath back. "But I personally am sick of chirping! And no mistake!"

Malinin struck the roof with his beak and began cursing me with all his might for having lied to him about sparrows having a marvellous time.

"And you watched them for a whole month..." he said, imitating my voice. "They have no worries, have no cares..."

"Well, it's not my fault if I thought so, is it?" I said.

But Kostya Malinin would not listen to me.

"I told you we should have turned into butterflies right from the start. Butterflies don't build nests and don't get eaten by cats, and they live on sweet nectar, not oats. That must taste really good!"

I said nothing. Kostya Malinin knew far more than I did about butterflies, of course. He once had a big collection of them, only he swopped it for some stamps. He was probably right, and we really should have turned into butterflies straightaway. It was very tempting, of course, the idea of fluttering about all day from flower to flower and eating sweet stuff all the time.

All the same, before turning into a butterfly I wanted to ask Kostya a bit more about them. Or else we might land up in a mess for the second time.

"Don't you remember Nina Nikolayevna telling us that butterflies pollinate flowers..." I said.

"Well, let them!" retorted Kostya. "You and I won't! We're not so stupid!"

Although there was an iron logic in Kostya's reply, I nevertheless decided to ask him one more question.

"And what about lessons?" I enquired. "Perhaps butterflies have to learn things too?"

"That's enough questions! See those cats over there!" Kostya Malinin howled at me like a madman.

I thought he was having me on. Then I looked and saw that three cats covered in coal-dust had jumped out of an attic window and had their eyes fixed on us. Two of them I had never seen before, but the third was our Muska. She had obviously made up her mind to eat me. There was no more time for reflection.

"Prepare to turn into butterflies!" I ordered in a feverish whisper.

"Right!"

"Ready, steady, go!"

"Wait a minute!" said Kostya Malinin. "What do we say? What are the words?"

I had completely forgotten that my old sparrow spell would be no good at all for turning into butterflies.

"Just a moment!" I said. "I'll alter it..."

"Get a move on," howled Kostya.

"Done it!" I said. "Repeat after me! 'A sparrow I don't want to be! A butterfly is just for me!'"

*A butterfly, I am quite sure,
Never has a single care!
So here go I! Here go I!
Turning into a butterfly!*

"It doesn't rhyme very well!" said Kostya, gazing terror-stricken at the approaching cats.

"Perhaps you'd rather end up inside a cat's belly, eh?" I said. "Come on, repeat it after me."

So Kostya Malinin closed his eyes in fright and began to mutter the words of my somewhat unrhythmic magic spell, catching me up with every word.

*A butterfly, I am quite sure,
Never has a single care!*

"If only we're in time!" I thought. "If only we manage to turn into butterflies before the cats pounce!" This was the last thought that flashed through my exhausted sparrow's head, worn out with all the worry, danger, fear and excitement...

Part three

CABBAGE WHITE BARANKIN AND GREEN EMPEROR MALININ

Event No. 19

A WELL-KNOWN PEST

While me and Kostya Malinin were whispering the words of our spell and concentrating, the cats led by Muska were not wasting time either. Moving stealthily, they gradually crept nearer.

"Just you wait, Muska," the thought flashed through my head. "If I get out of this alive, I'll give you what-for at home!"

Then I decided not to think about cats anymore, because it would stop me turning into a butterfly. So I tried to concentrate my attention entirely on flowers, on a life in which you needn't build nests or fight for bird-houses, but only flutter from flower to flower, bask in the sun and feed on nothing but nectar. But my thoughts kept straying to those revolting oats and I kept seeing sparrows and cats before my eyes, Venka with his catapult and lots of other unpleasant things from my sparrow life.

I got upset, opened my eyes and saw that the distance between me and the cats was now much shorter, and that I was still the wretched sparrow that I had been. Then I got even more upset and decided not to close my eyes anymore come what may.

After advancing a few more paces, the cats suddenly stopped and began hissing and miaowing something to one another.

"They're deciding who should eat what," I thought. "Dividing two sparrows between three cats. Well, let them... I probably won't have time to turn into a butterfly now..." Just in case I repeated the magic spell several times to myself:

*A butterfly, I am quite sure,
Never has a single care.
So here go I! Here go I!
Turning into a butterfly!*

Meanwhile the cats had finished their dividing: one began creeping towards Kostya, and Muska and her friend advanced towards me. "The

cunning old thing! She knows she couldn't manage me on her own... What have I ever done to her," I thought, not taking my eyes off Muska. "I only spilt ink over her once, and that was an accident..."

With about three paces to go Muska and her assistant stopped, squatted down, arched their backs and began to hiss. Scratching the iron roof with their claws, they got ready to attack. "They're going to pounce! So me and Kostya haven't turned into butterflies," I thought. "We didn't make it! This is the end!" I suddenly felt cold and got the shivers. This was probably the last time in my life that I would get the shivers. I was just about to cry out: "Goodbye for ever, Malinin! Forgive me for getting you mixed up in this!"

But then something strange happened to the cats: their eyes bulged, they gave a yowl and instead of pouncing, they backed away as fast as they could with their fur on end. Turning their heads wildly, the three of them sprang up and vanished through the attic window.

They disappeared so quickly and unexpectedly, as if they had seen a huge dog behind me and Kostya. I looked round, but there was no dog in sight. Instead I saw a pair of butterfly wings sticking up behind me like two sails.

So that was why the cats had taken fright: before their very eyes I had turned from an appetising sparrow into an unappetising butterfly! I had managed it after all! Fantastic! I flapped my little triangular-shaped wings delightedly and turned to Kostya Malinin to share my pleasure with him, but what I saw made my eyes goggle. Next to me, on the very spot where a few minutes earlier Malinin the sparrow had lain motionless more dead than alive, chirruping so faintly you could hardly hear him, was a magnificent butterfly with enormous triangular wings that were a gorgeous black and green. I had never seen such a beautiful butterfly, not even in a book.

Surely old Kostya Malinin could not have changed into such a splendid insect. No, that butterfly must be a real one, you could tell at a glance. But if it was real, where was my best friend Kostya Malinin? Perhaps he had been so scared that he had fallen off the roof onto the pavement below? I looked down. Or perhaps in all the confusion one of the cats had pounced on Kostya without me noticing? I looked at the attic window. Or perhaps he had taken fright and flown to the next tree? I turned round and began scrutinising a poplar growing next to the house.

"What are you fidgeting for, as if you were in a lesson?" the fabulous butterfly suddenly asked me in Kostya Malinin's voice.

I gaped at the butterfly and exclaimed incredulously:

"Who can she be?"

"I'm a he, not a she, you silly ass!"

"Well, who are you?"

"Come off it, Barankin. Are you pretending not to recognise me on purpose?"

"Is it you, Malinin?"

"Of course it is! Didn't you recognise me?"

"How on earth could I recognise you? So you've changed too, have you? I was afraid something had happened to you."

"No fear! Not on your life!" said Malinin, flapping his wings and making a great wind round himself.

I couldn't take my eyes off Kostya: he was so striking.

"What are you called, Kostya?" I asked.

"What am I called? That's easy! I'll remember in a minute. Are my wings black and green on top?"

"Yes, they are."

"And what about underneath?"

"A brownish black."

"With gold spots?"

"Yes. And there's a half-moon and a rainbow on each wing."

"Ah, now I know! I've turned into a Green Emperor of the *Papilio Demodocus* species."

"And what about me?"

"And you've turned into a... Turn round!"

I turned round. Malinin surveyed me critically from top to bottom.

"I see..." he said. "Small yellow wings with little black dots. That's easy. You've turned into a pest."

"What pest?"

"A garden pest. Known to most people as a cabbage white of the *Eurymus Philodice* species."

"Well, I never!" I exploded. "Why have I turned into a cabbage white and you into a Green Emperor?"

"Why this, why that? How should I know! Probably because Green Emperors are found in the Far East, and I lived for three years in Khabarovsk. And you're found in Central Russia."

"Is that right?"

"Yes. I had my own collection once. I know all the sorts of butterflies. I'm a Green Emperor and you're a pest."



"‘A pest!’ And a lot of use you are! If you want to know, it’s better to be a cabbage white than a Green Emperor."

"Why is that?"

"Because, because ... your wings are all pretty-pretty like a girl’s. I’d be ashamed to show myself to the kids, I mean the butterflies, with wings like that."

"You would, eh! Then show yourself with your own wings!"

"Alright, I will!"

I flew up over the roof and did a trial flutter by the attic window. My wings weren’t as strong and firm as a sparrow’s, of course, but they were very nice to fly with.

All the time you were flying you kept dropping into air pockets. Flying along and then dropping down. It gave you a funny sinking sensation in your stomach as if you were fainting with rapture as you flew. You felt like exclaiming "ooh", "aah" or "eeh" out loud like a girl. Or simply squealing with delight.

And ahead lay lots of delicious nectar! Ambrosia, you might say! And more air pockets! And the sinking feeling in your stomach that took your breath away! And the knowledge that all this would go on as long as me and Kostya wanted.

So what difference did it make if you were a harmless Green Emperor or a cabbage white pest? It was only humans who knew about who’s who in butterflies. The butterflies themselves didn’t know.

And if it really was like this, then "ooh", "aah" and "eeh", and three cheers for Malinin who had persuaded me to turn into a butterfly.

At this very moment my best friend, Green Emperor Malinin, flew up, and the two of us began to swoop about in the air on invisible swings.

"How do you like this?" Kostya asked me, as he swung down.

"Great!" I replied, swinging up. "Only I’m very hungry."

"We’ll soon do something about that," said Malinin. "I’ll give you a lovely meal of nectar in a minute. Drinking nectar is not the same as pecking oats. You can’t imagine how delicious it tastes, Yuri. Makes you lick your forelegs! Off we go!"

"Off we go!" said I. "Full speed ahead!"

"Off we go," said Kostya. "Full speed ahe-e-ead! Breathe out—breathe in! And wave your wi-i-ings! Light as a fe-e-eather! Off toge-e-ether."

Event No. 20
A SLEEPING BEAUTY

Me and Kostya circled the attic once more in farewell and were about to fly off for some nectar, when Kostya Malinin suddenly noticed a tiny yellow butterfly on the wall of the house. It was clinging to the brick wall under the gutter, its wings folded like a book.

"She's a real one!" said Kostya Malinin. "Not like you and me! Hi, there!" he shouted, waving a leg in the air. "She's a buckthorn."

"Never mind about that!" I said. "Get a move on. Let's go and have some nectar."

"Wait a minute. I want to say hello to her."

"That's the last straw! You old girl-chaser."

"Hello, butterfly!" said Kostya Malinin, settling on the wall next to the buckthorn.

"Green Emperor Kostya chases the girls! Green Emperor Kostya chases the girls!" I taunted Malinin, flying round his head.

"Salutations to all buckthorns!" said Kostya, raising both his forelegs in greeting.

"And shame on all girl-chasers!" I said.

Kostya greeted the butterfly once more, but she stayed silent and motionless, taking no notice of him whatsoever.

"Snooty thing!" I said. "Serves you right."

"No, she's not being snooty," said Kostya, taking a good look at the butterfly. "She's asleep! Of course, she's asleep!"

"A sleeping beauty, eh? I see. Wake up, sleeping beauty! Green Emperor Kostya himself of the *Papilio Demodocus* species wishes to make your acquaintancel!"

I sat down next to the butterfly and nudged her with my foreleg.

"It's no good," said Kostya. "Firing a cannon wouldn't wake her now. She's gone to sleep for the winter."

"Why is that?"

"Because it's a law of nature with them, with butterflies."

"What are you babbling about, Malinin? What law of nature?"

"It's true! In autumn all butterflies either die or go to sleep until the following spring. They have a schedule for who falls asleep when."

"Wait a minute. What about you and me?" I said in alarm.

"Well, what about us?"

"You and me are butterflies, so will we go to sleep on schedule too?"

"Well, since we're butterflies, we probably should go to sleep as well ... some time."

This "discovery" positively staggered me.

"Then why on earth did you and I turn into butterflies? If we might go to sleep at any moment for the whole winter! We only wanted to be butterflies for a day, but if we suddenly fall asleep we'll miss all the winter holidays. Oh, Malinin!"

"What are you making such a fuss about?" said Kostya. "You don't feel sleepy yet, do you?"

"No, not yet."

"Then let's go and get some nectar, and after that we'll see."

"What do you mean 'we'll see'? What if I fall asleep in the air, don't wake up till spring, then turn back into a human? What'll I do in the exams? I'll get two for everything, all because of you."

"Listen to him!" said Kostya. "It takes wild horses to drag him to bed at home, and now he's afraid of falling asleep in the air. You won't, don't worry. I guarantee you won't."

"Won't go to sleep?"

"No, of course not. What sort of butterflies go to sleep in the autumn? Ordinary ones. But you and I aren't ordinary ones."

"What sort are we?"

"We are anthropoid butterflies, my friend, see!" Malinin yelled at me.

"So what?" I yelled back.

"So maybe this law of nature doesn't apply to anthropoid butterflies."

"Maybe it doesn't, and maybe it does!"

I wanted to tell Kostya Malinin off a bit more for his negligence, particularly for having a butterfly collection and concealing that terrible law of nature from me, but at that moment a sparrow flew over our heads, flapping its wings, and immediately turned back. At the sight of the sparrow Malinin for some reason stopped yelling at me, cringed and hid under the roof.

The sparrow perched on a nearby wall and fixed a beady eye on me. His face seemed very familiar. When he turned sideways, I saw he had no tail. Now I recognised him at once: it was the tough-looking sparrow I had fought in the yard over the oats.

"Hi, there, chump!" I shouted to my old friend. "Not angry with me, are you?"

"Come and hide, Barankin!" I heard Kostya's voice behind me. "Or he'll peck you up!"

"Who'll peck me up? Barankin doesn't run away from sparrows..." No sooner had I said this, than Malinin flew out from under the roof, grabbed me and pulled me back under the gutter.

At that very moment the sparrow pounced. Discovering that I had vanished, he craned his neck in all directions, crept up to the sleeping butterfly, looked her over carefully, gobbled her up and flew off as if nothing had happened. I watched him go from under the roof, then looked hard at Malinin.

"I forgot to warn you that real sparrows like eating butterflies, Barankin, so try to keep out of their way..."

I felt a great desire to tell Kostya exactly what I was thinking at that very moment about him and about life as a butterfly, of course, but I folded my forelegs silently on my chest and restrained myself. I wasn't Malinin after all. It was he who had started snivelling when he got tired of being a sparrow. But I was Barankin! Since I had turned into a butterfly, I would put up with all the difficulties and inhuman suffering in silence like a man. Particularly because I hadn't got the strength to blast off at him anyway. I was so ravenous by then.

Event No. 21

UNDER CAPFIRE

Kostya and I waited until the sparrow flew away, then cautiously emerged from under the roof and flew down to get some nectar from a flower-bed we could see below. I kept sinking into air pockets as before, of course, but for some reason no longer felt that I was fainting with rapture. And I suddenly stopped wanting to say "ooh" as well.

"Birds are only dangerous in the air," said Malinin. "The nearer you get to the ground, the safer it is. Anyway, as soon as you see a sparrow, camouflage yourself."

"Camouflage yourself! What if I start eating nectar and get eaten myself, eh?" I felt a tremendous urge to ask Malinin this question, but again restrained myself and said nothing. There were lots of flowers in the flower-bed, red, white and blue ones, and they all gave off a wonderful aroma of nectar, like mother's baking in the kitchen.

The very smell of nectar made my mouth water and my head go dizzy. I didn't even hear what Kostya was saying to me. I chose the biggest flower and fluttered over it, looking for a place to land.

"Squash it!" a piercing voice rang out suddenly behind me.

I turned round in the air and saw two boys with spades nearby; they were waving their caps and running towards me, their feet clattering noisily.

"It's an unmated silkworm! Squash it! I know it!" cried one of them. Putting his fingers in his mouth, he gave a piercing whistle.

Since, according to friend Kostya, I was a cabbage white and had nothing whatsoever to do with an unmated silkworm, I did not take the slightest notice of the boys' shouts. I turned round calmly in the air and resumed my hovering over the big flower that smelt so appetisingly of nectar. At that moment a large shadow loomed up from behind, someone whistled nearby and I was knocked to the ground by a strong blast of air.

"Whoopee! Got it!" cried one of the boys, waving his cap.

The boy's voice sounded suspiciously familiar.

"No, we didn't!" said the other boy. "It's hiding among the flowers! Look for it!"

The second boy's voice also seemed familiar. I took a better look at the unmated silkworm destroyers and recognised my old class-mates, Venka Smirnov, the same Venka who had fired at me and Kostya with his catapult when we were sparrows, and Genka Koromyslov, Venka's faithful hound.

"Just you wait, Venka!" I thought. "It's lucky for you that I'm a butterfly now, or I'd pay you back for everything." Meanwhile Venka and Genka had started wandering around looking for me among the flowers. But I did not lose my head. As soon as I fell on the ground, I put my wings together and pretended to be a dead birch leaf instead of a butterfly. The boys walked right next to me, and one of them even pushed me with the tip of his shoe. I waited until they turned their backs to me, then hopped up and flew off.

"There it is!" the unmated silkworm destroyers cried, but it was too late.





I had already soared high into the air and quite by chance found myself next to Malinin.

"I called to you to fly away," Kostya yelled at me in alarm. "Only you were too busy with that flower!"

"But they were shouting 'Squash that silkworm', and you said I was a cabbage white!"

"Those blockheads don't know the difference!" said Kostya, settling on the clock on a post by the flower-bed.

I looked to see what the time was and scratched my head in dismay. The clock said exactly twelve, and our butterfly life was not at all what Kostya Malinin had promised it would be. I was getting more ravenous, but Venka and Genka wouldn't go away from the flower-bed. They kept winking at me, waving their hands, nodding and waiting patiently for me to fly down to the flowers again. But I wasn't that stupid! I was sure they would get fed up with waiting and go away, then me and Kostya could have as much nectar as we liked, but the lazy

good-for-nothings began whistling again, waving their caps and calling me all sorts of rude names.

"You're the pests!" I shouted angrily. "Zina Fokina is waiting for you at school to do some Sunday digging, and here you are playing around catching butterflies!"

After that Genka threw his cap at us, and Venka climbed up the post and fell down.

"We won't get any breakfast here!" said Kostya as if he knew exactly what I was thinking.

Event No. 22

GOODBYE, BOYS AND GIRLS! WE MAY NEVER MEET AGAIN...

"You know what," I said to Kostya, "let's fly to some vegetable patch. Everything is ripe now: turnips, carrots and cabbages. And there are flowers too. And not so many people."

"What are you saying, you poor old cabbage white," said Kostya. "I mustn't fly with you to any vegetable patch."

"And why not, pray?"

"Because this is the time of year when they try to get rid of pests like you."

"And how do they do that?"

"With all sorts of sprays and pesticides..."

At the sound of this my wings literally began to droop and coloured spots appeared before my eyes.

"What a life!" I thought angrily. "You get your wings pulled off in the street, you get sprayed on vegetable patches and pecked to bits in the sky by sparrows... What on earth did we change into butterflies for! To die of hunger?"

"Alright, Barankin, don't get upset," said Kostya. "I'll get you some nectar! Come with me!"

"Where?"

"To the school yard!"

"But that's where the kids are planting trees!"

"Don't worry. We'll eat as much nectar as we like, and take a look at our old mates as well..."

Kostya Malinin said this as if he was missing our class badly.

"Alright, why not!" I said. "We know all the kids. Perhaps they'll leave us alone..."

For some reason I too suddenly wanted to see our class-mates. I couldn't tell you why. And although at that moment what I longed for most of all in the world was something to eat, I suddenly wanted even more just to fly past our school, past our dear old classroom which for me has so many happy memories! Who said "happy"? And who said "our dear old classroom"? Could it have been me, Barankin? What was the matter with me? I must be going mad with hunger. To recover my senses I shook myself like a dog after a swim.

And I was right to do so, because the shaking made my miserable thoughts fly off in all directions like drops of water, and I immediately began to feel better. Now I could contemplate the meeting bravely, without any emotion, not like Kostya Malinin. As soon as he had started talking about our class-mates, his eyes got all sort of large and even a bit moist, I think.

"We'll have breakfast there too," said Kostya Malinin sadly.

"And dinner and supper," I replied perkily, sensing that breakfast alone would not be enough for me.

We flew off the clock and raced each other to the school yard. It was the first time in our lives that Kostya and I had hurried to school as quickly as we usually ran home. I was sure I would get there first, of course. So you can imagine my surprise, when I immediately fell about three blocks behind Kostya. At first I couldn't believe my eyes. Kostya was considered the weakest boy in the class physically, whereas no one even tried to compete with me in PE lessons. That was one subject where I always got top marks. Only my mother for some reason never regarded them as real marks. I decided to put a spurt on and began flapping my yellow triangles like mad, but this didn't help one iota. On his pretty-pretty wings Green Emperor Kostya flew straight as an arrow, cleaving the air and producing a kind of musical whistle around him, while I kept sinking into those beastly air pockets as before, reeling from side to side, somersaulting and lurching silently first onto one wing, then onto the other.

Seeing that I was lagging behind, Kostya Malinin, to my great shame, flew back and said something to me, Barankin, the strongest boy in the class, that I shall never forget for the rest of my life: "Hey, you, cabbage white! Can't you fly a bit faster? Why don't you keep up?" So saying, he deliberately flew on ahead, flew back again, then flew on, crying

"Why are you flying like a cabbage pie, Barankin? Get a move on! Not far to the nectar now!" I shall never forget these words of Malinin's either.

When he flew past triumphantly again, plying his wings like oars, I grabbed hold of his hind legs and made him tow me along. Seeing that I was no longer lagging behind, Kostya stopped saying nasty things to me. Try as he could, there was no getting rid of me now.

"It seems harder to fly now!" said Kostya. "Breathe out—breathe in!"

"I think it's much easier!" said I. "Let Kostya work for the two of us, since he's got such big wings," I thought. "I dragged him along on my tail, when I was a sparrow, now I'll have a bit of a rest."

Folding my wings I glided through the air after Malinin, enjoying the musical vibration of his wings and flapping my isosceles triangles from time to time for appearance's sake. In this way Kostya towed me right up to the school, to the very spot where our class was planting trees in the yard.

"Brake!" I shouted to Kostya, after he had pulled me over the top of a tree and, puffing hard, dragged me past the fence to the brick building of the school.

Landing on a second-floor window ledge, we crawled up to the edge and looked down. Everyone was hard at work in the yard. Some of the kids were digging holes, chatting cheerfully to one another, while others were carefully lowering the saplings into the ground and watering them from watering-cans. Kostya Sergeyev had deliberately rubbed earth all over himself and was pulling funny faces. Everyone was laughing. Everyone was happy! Everyone was having a good time!

"Let them work!" said Kostya. "They can work, while we eat nectar. If they found out we were eating real nectar, they would probably envy us..."

"Who's 'us'?" I asked.

"Us butterflies..." said Kostya Malinin hesitantly.

I remembered the "sleeping beauty" that had been eaten by the sparrow, listened to the rumbling of my empty stomach, darted a malevolent glance at the sparrows hopping about in the school yard and said:

"Oh, yes, of course, they would envy us..." I said this without any enthusiasm, turned away from the kids and saw Misha Yakovlev riding through the school gates on his bicycle with Alik Novikov on the back.

Shouting loudly, they rode straight up to Zina Fokina, jumped off and began telling her and the children round her something. It suddenly

went quiet in the yard. Nobody laughed or joked any more, and Kostya Sergeyev even wiped the earth off his face with a handkerchief and stopped clowning around.

"Something's happened," said Kostya.

I frowned. After talking to our prefect, Misha and Alik got back on the bike and rode off. Zina Fokina watched them go out of the corner of her eye, then called three boys from our class over, took their spades and gave them some instructions.

The boys ran out into the street and set off in different directions.

"They're looking for someone..." said Malinin.

"Not someone, but you and me!" I said to Kostya.



"Well, let them," said Kostya. "They can look, while we have some nectar. Come on!"

I said nothing. I was getting more and more ravenous, of course, and the nectar was not far away... But the sparrows weren't far away either, and their chirping took away my appetite completely.

"Let's hope they don't gobble us up too..." I thought, watching the sparrows dart about in the flower-bed. I said something quite different, of course.

"Let's go!" I said loudly and firmly, adding quietly to myself: "Goodbye, everyone! If me and Kostya get eaten by sparrows, we may never meet again!"

Aiming for one of the flower-beds, I flapped my wings and did a swallow-dive off the window ledge as if I were diving off a board into cold water...

Event No. 23

AN ANTI-SNEEZE INJECTION

Once again the air was filled with a delicious smell of nectar, like mother baking in the kitchen. My mouth began to water and my head felt dizzy again. I folded my wings, aimed for the middle of the biggest flower and dived at it head-first, but unfortunately missed (which was not surprising) and got stuck in the grass right up to the heels of my hind legs. I had to pull myself out and start all over again.

This time I climbed up the stalk and put my proboscis, or coiled "tongue" right into the middle of the flower, where I thought the nectar must be. But there turned out to be no nectar in the flower at all. It smelt of nectar, but did not have any. It smelt good, just like mother's empty perfume bottle, but there was nothing to eat. Then I went and dived head-first into the flower, so that only my wings and legs were sticking out, and felt all round the sides in the darkness with my "tongue", but at this point someone came crawling out of the flower towards me.

I decided it must be another butterfly that had got to the flower before me and eaten up all the nectar. The very thought made me furious. There was I you might say risking my life for nectar, and someone calmly comes along and takes it from under my very nose. I butted the butterfly with my head. The butterfly buzzed menacingly and butted me back,

then put down its head against mine and squeezed me out of the flower, like toothpaste out of a tube. I was so enraged that I hit the stamens with my wings. A cloud of pollen rose up and enveloped me, almost making me choke.

"Just you wait, butterfly," I said, trying to drive away the pollen with my wings. "Just dare to show your face, and I'll let you have it... Aaa-tish-ooo! I'll teach you to steal other people's nectar... Aaa-tish-ooo!"

While I was sneezing, I saw something climb out of the flower ... only it wasn't a butterfly, but a bumble-bee, a real bumble-bee, all stripy as if it was wearing pyjamas. It climbed out of the flower and stared at me hard. While it looked at me, I sat on the edge of the flower and sneezed all over it unable to stop. The bumble-bee was so taken aback that it even stopped buzzing. I sneezed and it wiped itself with its foreleg, I sneezed again and it wiped itself again in silence. I must have sneezed at the bee about ten times, no less before I realised what I was doing and began to feel scared. "Who do you think you're sneezing at, Barankin?" I said to myself. "You're sneezing all over a bumble-bee, you silly cabbage... Any minute now it will—aaa-tishoo!—give you an anti-sneeze injection, and that'll teach you to sneeze at bumble-bees. You were stung by a bumble-bee once, when you were human, so you know what it's like—aaa-tish-oooo!"

"Yes, I know alright!" I answered myself. Suddenly, from sitting on the edge of the flower, I fell over backwards into the grass. Having somersaulted backwards several times and quickly coiled up my empty "tongue", I got on an even keel and began flying quietly away from the bee into the bushes, away from the flower-beds, across the path and into the trees where amid the tree-trunks there was a flash of something brightly coloured like Kostya Malinin's wings.

I thought Kostya had abandoned me shamefully in the flower-bed; but it turned out that a bee had chased him into the bushes too. It was still pursuing him, buzzing something threatening in bee language.

"Serves him right!" I thought, watching the bee chase grimly after Kostya. "It's a pity there's only one bee. I would let hundreds of them loose on him now, so that next time he wouldn't talk a load of nonsense and mislead other people. 'We'll just flutter from flower to flower! Full speed ahead! Wave your wings! Light as a feather! Off together! And eat as much nectar as we like!' Just let that bee give him a dose of 'nectar' now, and he won't want to turn into a butterfly again... Aaa-tish-ooo!"

"Help!" Malinin cried out. "Barankin! Where are you? Oh, dear!"

I wanted the bee to go on chasing Kostya and teach him a lesson, but when he cried out in such a pathetic voice, I began to feel sorry for him. Then I remembered that Malinin was a butterfly, not a human. If the bee stung him, he might get very ill or even die from the poison. What would I do then? I didn't know how butterflies reacted to bee stings, perhaps they just couldn't take them at all...

Grabbing a twig, I flew up to the bee from behind and hit it on the head with all my might. Stunned by the blow, the bee collapsed into the bushes. I suddenly felt faint with hunger, keeled over, and collapsed into the grass...

Event No. 24

THE TERRIBLE LAW OF NATURE BEGINS TO OPERATE

When I opened my eyes I saw that I was lying on the bank of a large puddle, with my best friend Malinin sitting next to me and fanning me with his beautiful wings.

I don't know why I opened my eyes. I certainly didn't want to open them. Nor did I want to say "ooh" anymore, or "aah", or "eeh". And the desire to squeal with delight had disappeared too. What was there to squeal about? That wretched pollen kept tickling my nose... Aaa-tish-ooo! And the sinking sensation in my stomach that I was fainting with rapture had vanished completely too. Aaa-tish-ooo! At least the feeling that I was fainting was still there. But what from? Probably from hunger... Everything had gone. Only my spirits were sinking. For some reason they sank lower and lower. Any minute now they would sink away altogether and that would be that. Aaa-tish-shoo! I hardly had the strength to sneeze anymore...

"Why don't you get up, Barankin?" Kostya asked me.

"I just feel like lying down, that's why," I said. "Aaa-tish-shooo!"

What was the matter with me? I just couldn't stop sneezing!

"Have you caught cold?" asked Malinin.

"No," I said. "I've just had enough 'oohing, aahing and eehing'..."

Malinin shook his head very slowly and sadly, gave a deep sigh and said:

"Know where we can get some nectar?"

"You know what you can do with your nectar... Aaa-tish-shoo!"

I looked Malinin up and down contemptuously and nearly burst out laughing.

He was sitting at the edge of the puddle, covered in pollen, with one wing sticking up and the other hanging down like a dog's ear. He looked so miserable, that I felt terribly sorry for him again, but this time I controlled myself. *

Mustering up what remained of my strength I crawled to the puddle without a word and began to drink the rain water greedily. Malinin made another attempt to start talking to me, but I greeted all his questions with a contemptuous silence. I had decided never to talk to him again.

I drank the puddle water (instead of the promised nectar) demonstratively and meditated. Had I really been mistaken? No, it couldn't be true that the life I had dreamed of on the bench in the yard didn't exist. There must be a life like that, and I would jolly well find it at all costs. It was just that Kostya Malinin and I had been looking for it in the wrong place. Of course it had been a mistake to turn into butterflies and sparrows. That was perfectly clear now. They seemed at first glance to have a marvellous life, whereas in fact it was quite intolerable. But why? I drank the water in silence, and thought and thought until at last I decided that the sort of life Kostya and I had dreamed of probably didn't exist on earth...

Just then an ant ran past me along the bank of the puddle. It kept running along and stopping. I watched it and went on thinking painfully: "If such a life doesn't exist on earth, perhaps it does exist THERE, under the earth, and if you can't fly away from worries and cares, perhaps you can simply hide from them, run away from them into that ant-hill, say..."

I watched the ant's progress and shook my head doubtfully. You could hide in an ant-hill, of course, but how would you get on with the other ants? Everyone knows that ants are hard workers. I had never seen them sitting down doing nothing. They were forever scurrying somewhere or hurrying back from somewhere, always carrying a leaf, or a bit of earth, or a pine needle... And whenever you looked at an ant-hill, they were always repairing it from dawn to dusk...

No sooner had you turned into an ant than they would make you sweat away with them on some building site... No, thank you. If we risked turning into something again, it wouldn't be an ant. What could it be? What could we turn into, so as not to get involved in the awful

scrapes and skirmishes from which Kostya and I had escaped by the skin of our teeth? What should we change into? What...?

Suddenly I remembered that on the fateful day of the general meeting Alik Novikov had for some reason called us drones. Drr-ooo-nes! Wait a minute! What exactly were drones? Weren't they creatures who led the sort of life that Kostya and I had dreamed of on the bench? Yes, I thought they were. In fact, I was sure they were. In fact, I was absolutely certain they were! That's why they were called drones. And if so, why did we turn into sparrows and butterflies? What fools we were! What blockheads!

"Malinin!" I cried (having realised our mistake I immediately stopped being angry with Kostya, of course, and immediately decided to tell him of my discovery). "Malinin!" I cried. "We are a pair of silly idiots, Malinin!"

"Yes, we are," Malinin was quick to agree with me. "Especially you, Barankin."

"Me, why I'm a real twit, Malinin! Why didn't I think of it before! We've lost so much time!"

"We certainly have!" agreed Kostya.

"Why did we go and turn into sparrows and butterflies?"

"That's just what I was going to ask you, Barankin!" said Malinin.

"Why on earth did we go and turn into butterflies and sparrows?"

"When we should have turned into drones!"

"Into drones? Why into drones?" exclaimed Kostya Malinin in a scared voice.

"Because, my friend, drones are called drones because they don't do anything at all or do only what they feel like doing. And that's just what you and I dreamed of on the bench."

"Now look here, Barankin!" remonstrated Malinin in a nasty-sounding voice. "All because of you I've used up so much energy on doing nothing, that I might as well have been doing something all the time."

"Malinin!" I cried. "I've used up just as much energy as you! So now we'll turn into drones and have a nice rest!"

"Turn into something else!" howled Kostya Malinin. "Again? Oh, no, Barankin! I've had enough, Barankin! I'm sick to death of turning into something else."

"Oh, come on, Kostya! These two times don't count. If you don't turn into the right thing, it doesn't count."

"Why doesn't it count?"

"Because you and I must turn into the right thing after all this messing about... And the right thing is drones!"

"What drones?" asked Kostya in a quiet and somehow indifferent voice.

"Come off it," I said. "Don't you know what drones are?"

"No, I don't know what drones are," Malinin replied, yawning and stretching for some reason.

"Come off it, Kostya," I said worriedly. "You must know what drones are..."

"Why must I? What about you, Barankin? Do you know?"

I was just about to shout automatically that of course I knew what drones were, when I stopped short and said nothing, because to tell the truth I hadn't the faintest idea what these wonderful creatures that Kostya Malinin and I wanted to turn into looked like! So I said something quite different instead.

"Come on, Malinin," I said. "Don't you remember Nina Nikolayevna telling us about drones and showing us drawings of them..."

"No, I don't," said Malinin. "Nor do you..."

"Why not?"

"Because that was the lesson when you and I invented a new language..."

He was right. In that lesson Kostya and I really hadn't been listening to Nina Nikolayevna. We had been inventing a new language. It was no easy task, for we had to invent a language that could be understood by only two people in the whole world, me and Kostya Malinin. So obviously we hadn't had time to think about Nina Nikolayevna and drones...

"Wait a minute, Malinin," I said. "You did look at the board once or twice, didn't you?"

"So what?"

"Well, perhaps you can remember what drones look like, eh?"

"Can't remember a thing," said Malinin, yawning and stretching again.

"Perhaps you're just saying that on purpose so as not to turn into drones, eh?"

"Honest I'm not!"

It was a terrible blow. Neither Malinin nor I had the faintest idea what the drones we wanted to turn into looked like...

So what did that mean? That the transformation was cancelled? That it was not going to take place? But how could it take place, Barankin, if you didn't know what the **THING** into **WHICH** you were about to

be transformed looked like? If only I'd paid attention in that lesson! Oh, Barankin, Barankin! You should have listened to Nina Nikolayevna, and not tried to invent a new language!

"Drr... drr... drr..." Malinin suddenly began mumbling to himself. "I remember... they're little bees... with wi.. wi.. wi..."

At this point Malinin swayed strangely and keeled over.

"With wi... wi... wings!" I finished for him. "That's right, Malinin!"

He had remembered! Now I too could remember the drawing of drones on the board in our classroom. They were bees, male bees, with small transparent wings...

Now at last Kostya and I could have a proper rest! From all our cares and worries. All my hopes, my enthusiasm, and even my wasted energy flooded back to me!

"Get up, Malinin!" I shouted to Kostya. "Stop lazing about! We've got work to do!" I said, meaning by the word "work" the one and only necessary, correct and sensible transformation, namely into drones, that we now had to carry out. "Get up, Malinin!" I howled in a terrible voice, trembling with impatience and the desire to swell the ranks of the world's drones with my own and Kostya's person.

For some reason, however, my joyful shouts did not have the slightest effect on Kostya.

Malinin continued to lie on one side and muttered something in reply, but I couldn't understand a word.

"What did you say?" I asked him.

"Grrr..." said Kostya.

"Kostya, what's the matter with you?" I shouted at Malinin with all my might and began to shake his leg. "What is it? Are you pretending to be asleep, eh? So you don't want to turn into a drone! Well, be like that! I'll do it on my own."

"Grrr..." Malinin replied and then began to mumble such nonsense that I realised at once Kostya was not pretending. He really was asleep!

He'd fallen asleep! He'd remembered about drones and dropped off at the last moment! At a moment like that! Before a transformation like that! Fallen asleep according to all the terrible rules and laws of nature by which all real butterflies go to sleep in the autumn... Fallen asleep without even warning me. After saying that this law didn't apply to us, anthropoid butterflies, he himself had gone and fallen asleep, like the "sleeping butterfly" that was gobbled up by the sparrow... Thank goodness there were no sparrows

around... At least not at the moment, but it wouldn't be long before they appeared. I must wake Kostya up, as quickly as possible. Before it was too late. Before those wretched sparrows turned up again.

I pulled Kostya's legs, poked him in the side, and tugged at his wings, but it was no good. Kostya Malinin did not wake up. I began to feel alarmed.

"Kostya!" I yelled. "Wake up this moment! Do you hear? Or you and I will never be friends again!"

"Grrr..." said Kostya Malinin.

"If he's gone to sleep like a human, I'll be able to wake him, of course," I thought. "But if he's gone to sleep like a butterfly, until next spring, according to their schedule, then I ... then I ... then I'll wake him up all the same! I must wake him up whatever happens. I must... What must I? He must... What must he? I know! I must pour water over him!"

I flew down to the puddle and started filling my proboscis with water, when suddenly through the bushes I heard the voices of some of our class-mates coming towards us...

Event No. 25

THEY'VE GOT A BUTTERFLY LIKE ME IN THEIR COLLECTION

"It's not fair!" said Kostya Semyonov, appearing from behind a bush. "Here we are working, while Barankin and Malinin have gone to the cinema..."

They all began making a noise, and I thought to myself: "I'd like to show you the picture me and Kostya have seen!"

"Semyonov is right!" said Vera Bolshova. "We should either all work, or all not work..."

"Barankin and Malinin have gone off somewhere, and Smirnov and Penkin haven't turned up at all!" said Semyonov.

"Fancy them arriving at a moment like this," I thought, hiding behind a clump of grass. "I wonder how long they're going to stay here."

"That Barankin should be thrown out of the school, he should!" shouted Era angrily. "We've coddled him enough!"

"Where should he be thrown?" asked Zina Fokina. "Into the street?"

"Why into the street?" Era replied. "Move him to School No. 315..."

"Why to No. 315?" asked Kostya Semyonov.

"Because that's the school we're competing against... Let Barankin get his twos there! That'll be all the better for us!"

"So you suggest sending Yuri's twos to another school, do you, Era?" said Zina Fokina. "And what's to be done with Barankin?"

"While you lot are sorting things out, we'll go and have a drink of fizzy!" said Kostya Semyonov.

"I'm sick of hearing about Barankin," added Valya Cherevatkin. "Let's go."

"Young nature-lovers stay with me, please!" said Zina.

The boys went off, and the girls sat down on the grass around Zina Fokina, giggling and talking about something to one another.

"Quiet, girls!" said Zina Fokina, opening a big book. "Pay attention, please! The subject of today's lesson is..."

"Butterflies!" shouted the girls in unison, waving their butterfly nets.

"Correct! Butterflies!" said Zina and began turning over the pages.

Butterflies? What did that mean? It meant ... that me and Kostya were the subject of today's lesson. Well, I never! I almost choked with the water I was about to pour over Kostya Malinin. Fancy that! Now I knew why those crazy young nature-lovers had brought butterfly nets with them: to catch us, butterflies. Now it might even be dangerous to wake them: to catch us, butterflies. Now it might even be dangerous to wake Kostya up... I let the water out of my proboscis. He would wake up, flap his wings drowsily, and the girls would nab him in a single swipe... What was I to do with him? Hide him, perhaps? There was a piece of newspaper over there. I could cover him with it so nobody would see him. I grabbed hold of the paper and began dragging it towards Kostya.

Zina Fokina adjusted her glasses, cleared her throat and began to read in a most unpleasant voice:

"Butterflies are one of the most interesting phenomena in the insect world..."

I stopped for a moment to have a rest, then set off again with renewed vigour dragging the paper across the path. (The most dangerous spot! Don't let anyone see me!) Reaching the other side, I crawled into the grass and took a look round. Everything seemed to be alright. Kostya Malinin was still snoring away peacefully, and the girls were sitting quietly. Zina Fokina went on with her reading:

"Butterflies are also of great importance to the economy..."

"Look, Zina. A butterfly! A butterfly!" one of the young nature-lovers suddenly cried out wildly.

I turned round and froze to the spot.

"Where? Where is it? What butterfly?" the other girls began shouting.

"Over there! By the puddle in the grass! Surely you can see it!"

Zina Fokina closed her book, stared hard at the grass and pricked up her ears like a bloodhound. I broke into a sweat.

"We've had it!" the thought flashed through my head. "They've noticed one of us. But which one? Me or Kostya? If only it's not Kostya! Don't let it be Kostya!"

There was a long silence. I stood like an idiot by the piece of paper, wiping the sweat off my brow and staring at the girls. They all seemed to be looking at Kostya Malinin, while I stood there like an idiot gaping at them (what else could I do?).

"Yes," said Zina Fokina, adjusting her glasses and looking in my direction. "A cabbage white of the *Eurymus Philodice* species. Don't take any notice, girls! We've already got one of those in our collection!" She stuck her nose back into the book, and I was so relieved that I even felt angry.

"So they've got a butterfly like me in their collection, have they! Well, I never! Not a hope, you nutty nature-lovers!"

I made a rude face at the girls, who had immediately stopped taking any notice of me after what Fokina had said. But that was just what I wanted. Now I could cover Kostya with the paper in a trice, without attracting attention to myself.

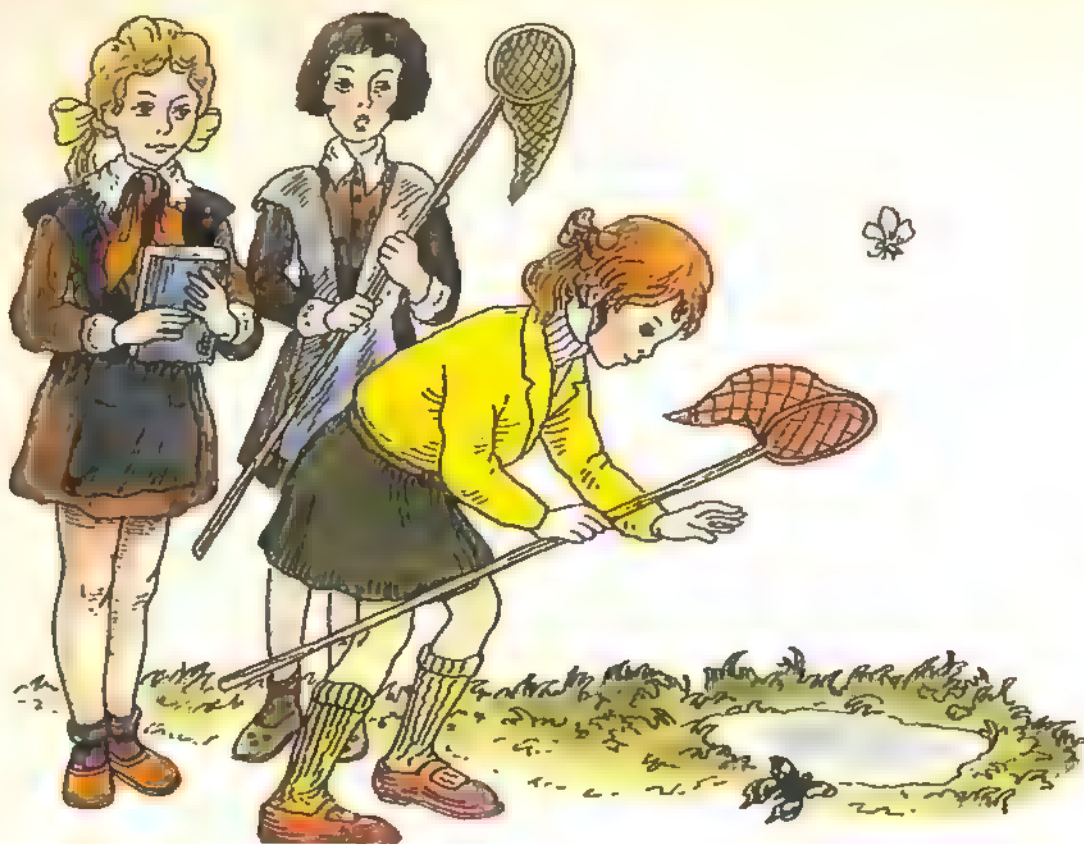
To the count of one I dragged the piece of paper up to Kostya and to the count of two I began to stand it on its side. But a gust of wind whipped it away and carried it over the grass.

"Oh, Zina!" squealed another of the nature-lovers, as if she had been bitten by a snake. "Just look what a lovely butterfly! I don't think we've got one of those in our collection!"

"Will you please pay attention, girls!" said Zina Fokina in a most displeased voice. She took her eyes off the book and then stared, goggle-eyed, as if transfixed. "What's that?" she whispered in amazement. "It can't be! Oh, girls! I must be dreaming! Pinch me somebody! Oh, girls! It's a Green Emperor! A real Green Emperor from the Ussuri region. How on earth did it get here? A Green Emperor in our town! It's a miracle! A fantastic discovery! A subject for a scientific report!"

As she babbled these words, Zina Fokina quietly grasped one of the butterfly nets, stood up, took a step forward and froze on one foot.

So what I feared most of all had happened: the crowd of young



nature-lovers led by Zina Fokina had discovered the sleeping Green Emperor, that is, not a Green Emperor, but the sleeping Kostya Malinin, and now my best friend was threatened with perhaps the most deadly of all dangers to which he and I had been exposed up to now...

"Girls!" Zina ordered the dumbfounded nature-lovers in a whisper. "Encircle it quietly. I'll catch it myself!"

Silently, their nets at the ready, the girls began to encircle the sleeping Malinin, the very Kostya Malinin whom they, in their ignorance, thought to be a Green Emperor that had miraculously flown into our town from the remote Ussuri region!

Event No. 26

KILL IT, DRY IT AND PRESS IT

"We'll catch it now!" hissed Zina Fokina, wobbling on one leg afraid of frightening Kostya away. "We'll catch it and pop it into the finishing-off box, then into the dryer and then into the press."

"Grrr..." came the voice of the sweetly sleeping Malinin.

Kostya slept on blissfully unaware of the terrible fate being prepared for him by our class prefect, Zina Fokina. There was not a moment to lose.

Particularly because the boys who had come back from the street immediately joined Zina and expressed the most ardent desire to catch Kostya Malinin, that is, the Green Emperor, and put it in the finishing-off box. (Lazy things! They'd rather do anything than work!)

Venka Smirnov and Genka Koromyslov, who had just appeared on the scene, also decided to take a hand in this nasty business. Venka pushed the girls aside, took one look at Kostya Malinin and yelled: "That's the one me and Genka tried to catch just now in the street!"

Instead of ticking Smirnov and Koromyslov off for being late for the Sunday tree planting, Zina Fokina just hissed at Venka, and taking advantage of the confusion, the girls pushed the boys back into the bushes and carefully began to narrow the fateful circle round the sleeping Kostya Malinin.

What should I do? What could I do?

I flew out of the grass over to Zina Fokina and fluttered round her right ear, begging her to leave Kostya Malinin alone.

"Please don't, Zina!" I cried. "It's not a butterfly! It's a human in butterfly form. It's not a Green Emperor! It's Kostya Malinin!"

But Zina Fokina just brushed me off, like an annoying fly.

"Don't do it, girls," I cried with all my might.

But they seemed to have grown deaf and blind: they did not see or hear me, as if I didn't exist at all.

The terrible circle grew narrower and narrower round Kostya Malinin, closer and closer.

I fluttered about madly, then flew up in the air. There was only one thing left: to knock the sleeping Malinin off the stone. To ram him off! Perhaps the jolt would wake him up. Putting my wings together, I zoomed down, levelled out over the grass and rammed Kostya in the side with my head as hard as I could. The strong blow made everything go dark before my eyes and I saw stars, but Kostya fell off the stone, fluttered about and woke up in the air, rolling his eyes like a madman.

"Soar up, Kostya! Soar up!" I shouted desperately.

"Saw what up?" said Kostya Malinin, rubbing his eyes sleepily, quite unaware of what was going on.

I grabbed his leg and flew upwards dragging him after me. Goodness

knows where I got the strength from! In a flash I hoisted him right up above the bushes, like a lift.

Angry shouts and squeals broke out below.

"Is it the break?" Kostya asked me in a sleepy voice and closed his eyes again.

"Not on your life!" I said, giving Kostya a shove from behind to make him pull himself together. I could still see stars, like northern lights before my eyes. "Haven't you woken up yet?"

"Just a moment!" said Malinin. "Just a moment and I'll have some nectar and get on with my geometry... That Mishka should have his wings pulled off..."

"What Mishka?"

"Yakovlev ... of the swot species. So he won't ever agree to do geometry with us on Sunday..."

Malinin was about to say something else, but suddenly stopped flapping his wings, started snoring loudly and fell right into the bushes where the leaves were thickest.

"Don't go to sleep, Kostya, or you've had it!" I yelled and flew down into the lilac bushes after my friend, catching my wings on twigs and leaves.

Kostya collided with a branch and woke up again. There were ants crawling backwards and forwards along the branch: they kept getting under my feet, and I had to give two of them a good kick to stop them from interfering in my business at such a critical stage, you might say.

"Turn from a butterfly into a drone at once, do you hear?" I said to Kostya, shooing the ants away.

"What drone? What butterfly? Have you gone round the bend, Barankin?" said Malinin, rolling onto his side.

Malinin was probably so befuddled with sleep that he didn't know what was going on and was talking a load of rubbish. I lifted him by his wings:

"Turn into a drone, Malinin! Hear me?"

"How can a human turn into a drone? You're a crackpo-po-pot ... of the huma-ma-ma species ... I mean a ... I mean ... I wanna go to sleep," said Malinin, rolling over onto the other side.

I could hear the shouts and cries of the girls still searching in the garden. If they noticed Green Emperor Kostya's gaudy wings in the bushes, we were finished.

"Will you or will you not turn into a drone? This is the last time I'm asking you!" Once more I lifted up the drowsy Malinin, while managing to kick out with my hind legs at two crafty ants who were trying to crawl over my stomach.

"Alright, Barankin!" grunted Kostya. "If it means so much to you... Only I'll just have a sleep first..."

"No! You'll change into a drone first, then have a sleep! Do as I tell you!" I grabbed Kostya by his forelegs and shook him with all my might, chanting: "Repeat after me! Repeat after me!"

*Not by night, nor by day
Will I be a butterfly!
The best thing in the world alone
Is to be a little drone!*

"It's hiding over there!" Zina Fokina's voice rang out nearby. "I knew it wouldn't go far! Encircle the bush, girls!"

"That's it! They've seen us! We've had it!" I thought. "And Malinin's gone to sleep again! Now there's nothing I can do!"

The thought made my wings droop sadly, and I didn't even start to push away the ants that were crawling over me from all directions.

"Let them," I thought to myself. "It doesn't matter now..."

Suddenly at that very moment Kostya Malinin burst out laughing.

I looked at him in horror—could he really have gone potty from all these perils—and saw that two ants were crawling over his stomach and tickling him with their whiskers. They were tickling him, and he was giggling, quietly, it was true, but all the same laughing in his sleep. Idiot, how could I have forgotten that Kostya Malinin was terribly ticklish. The times I had woken him up at summer camp by tickling him. Now I had remembered it, thanks to the ants. Without losing a second, I began to tickle Kostya under his arms with all my four legs. Green Emperor Malinin's quiet giggle immediately turned into a great roar of laughter, and he woke up. In a flash. Opened his eyes and was wide awake instantly.

Shaking all over, screaming with laughter like a madman, and clutching his stomach, he panted:

"Oh, Barankin! Ha! Ha! Why are you tickling me? Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"Hee! Hee! Hee!" I replied.

I also burst out laughing, firstly, from nervous tension, and secondly, because I was so glad Kostya had woken up from that awful sleep and was his old self again. In my nervous delight I even forgot about the terrible danger that continued to threaten Kostya Malinin. The main thing was that I went on tickling him, although he had woken up. If I stopped tickling him, he might go and fall asleep again.

"Give over!" said Kostya Malinin to me and the ants, pushing us away. "That's enough tickling for today! Ha! Ha! What's all the noise about? Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Then I remembered with horror what was threatening my best friend, and not only remembered, but realised that judging from their voices, Zina and the other girls had already begun to encircle our bush.

"Malinin!" I yelled. "Concentrate and turn into a drone this very minute!"

"Why into a drone? What drone?" asked Kostya, stretching drowsily.

"Because Zina Fokina and the young nature-lovers are out there. They think you're a Green Emperor and want to put you in the finishing-off box, then the dryer, and then the press!"

"In the finishing-off box? Why in the finishing-off box?"

"For their collection!" I yelled.

At the word "collection" all traces of sleep vanished from Malinin like magic. He obviously understood everything in a trice and realised the full horror of the situation in which he and I found ourselves. And it wasn't surprising. Kostya knew perfectly well what a collection was. He had once been a young nature-lover himself and had the sort of collection that Zina Fokina wanted to put him in now.

"Why didn't you wake me up before?"

"Why didn't I wake you up before! You can thank the ants for reminding me... Just hurry up and repeat after me!"

I began to shout the spell right into Malinin's ear, but I could see he wasn't listening. The word "collection" had scared him so much, that he couldn't understand what I wanted him to do.

I yelled with all my might:

*The best thing in the world alone
Is to be a little drone!*

Malinin said nothing, then all of a sudden he shouted:

*Oh, my goodness, why should I
Want to be a butterfly!
When the best thing on this planet
Is to be a little an-n-nt!*

At first I didn't realise that this time me and Malinin were about to turn into different insects and that our paths would, as they say, diverge. I wanted to be a drone, and Malinin wanted to throw in his lot with the ants! Why on earth with the ants? Didn't he realise what that would mean? No, he didn't realise anything at all at that moment, as far as I could see. All he knew was that it was better to be a live hard-working ant, than a dead butterfly.

What do you think? Could I have left Malinin alone in a situation like that? Could I have turned into an idle drone and let Malinin turn into a hard-working ant? Of course not! Was I responsible for Malinin or not? I was, and I would have to pay with my head! After all, it was me who had got him mixed up in all this, not the other way round.

At that very moment to crown it all there was a sound like galloping horses, then the snapping of branches. Butterfly nets of all shapes and sizes were thrust through the bushes. Some girls even started climbing up the tree with their nets, thereby cutting off our last escape route.

This was the end! I had no choice, but to take a deep breath and expend what remained of my failing strength on the spell that idiot Malinin had thought up on the spur of the moment.

*Oh, my goodness, why should I
Want to be a butterfly!*

I gabbled after Kostya Malinin.

*When the best thing on this planet
Is to be a little an-n-nt!*

But I wasn't so sure of that. What are we doing, Malinin? Why on earth are we turning into ants of all things!

This was the last thought that flashed through my tired butterfly brain, worn out with worry, fear, terror and anxiety...

Part four
·HELP! MIRMIKS! CURTAINS FOR MALININ

Event No. 27

*THAT FOILS ZINA FOKINA'S PLANS
AND SAVES ME AND KOSTYA*

"Zina!" a girl hissed in the bushes. "What if the cabbage white flies out? What shall we do with it?"

By the cabbage white the girls meant me, of course. So to my ears the question sounded like "What if Yuri Barankin flies out, Zina? What shall we do with him?"

"Put him in the finishing-off box too!" replied Zina Fokina. "We'll display the Green Emperor, and I'll use the cabbage white to teach you how to work with the press."

"That's the end of you, Barankin!" I thought, listening to the sounds through the bushes. Judging by them the final preparations were in progress for the storming of the lilac bush: there were clinking bottles, clattering butterfly boxes and terrible questions followed by even more terrible answers.

"Zina, if we catch the Green Emperor (that is, Kostya Malinin) in our net, can we pick it up by the wings?"

"Certainly not! A butterfly's wings must never be touched... Finishing-off boxes at the ready! Who's got the pins for sticking it down, Nina?"

"I have."

"Pins at the ready!"

"Ooh, I'm scared!"

"You take the pins, Katya! Zoya, you carry out the observations!"

"That's what I am doing..."

"Everybody ready?"

"Yesss!" the girls hissed like snakes.

"Open your finishing-off boxes!"

They opened their finishing-off boxes and there was a strong smell of tobacco. Someone sneezed loudly. Someone else said: "Ooh, I'm scared!" One girl got stung by a nettle and squealed. The others shushed her. There was the cracking of branches being pushed cautiously aside. Then questions:



"Where are they?"

"Over there."

"Where? I can't see. On the branch down there?"

"No! Further up!"

"Up there?"

"No, further down!"

"Further down still! Right! Now left! See that dry leaf with the two butterflies next to it!"

"Ooh, yes! That's them!"

"Quiet, you!"

The rustling of the moving branches grew louder and Zina Fokina's flushed face, scratched and covered with cobwebs, appeared in the densest part of the lilac bush, her eyes darting wildly over the leaves.

"What's there? What's there?" the girls hissed from all sides.

"Nothing..." said Zina Fokina in a bewildered voice.

If Zina Fokina had looked a little more carefully at the spot where she had seen two butterflies with her own eyes a moment or two ago, she would have noticed the two small black ants clinging with all their six legs to the rough bark of the lilac bush, of course, but Zina Fokina was not interested in ants. She took one more sad look at the branches, gave a deep sigh and said:

"They've vanished into thin air. There's nothing here!"

"What do you mean—nothing? What about us?" one of the ants whispered to the other.

The blue-eyed ant laughed, twitched its whiskers and clapped the ant with black eyes on the back.

The black-eyed ant looked at Zina Fokina's disappointed face, twitched its whiskers too, but said nothing.

"They must be here!" Zina Fokina whispered. "I saw them with my own eyes. They couldn't just disappear into thin air!" She took another long tearful look at the bush and said: "Damn and blast it!"

"She's swearing!" squealed the blue-eyed ant delightedly (it was Kostya Malinin, of course). "Zina Fokina has used two swear words! That's great!"

Kostya twirled his whiskers, clapped the black-eyed ant on the back (that was me, Barankin, of course) and went into spasms of silent laughter.

Zina Fokina took a step back. The branches swished into place and me and Kostya were left alone on the swaying lilac twig.

"Whoopee!" said Kostya Malinin. "The threat of an air attack is over. The enemy has retreated."

Kostya Malinin was happy, as happy as a sandboy, that is, as happy as an ant who had just escaped from mortal danger when it was a butterfly. His cheerful ant voice sounded like an electric buzzer.

Although, like Kostya, I too had escaped from mortal danger and managed to turn into an ant in the nick of time, I was not all that pleased about it: after all, if we had managed to turn into ants, we could equally well have turned into drones. And I wasn't expecting any good at all to come from being ants, so I didn't share Kostya's delight, but said gloomily:

"Oh, Malinin! What have you done!"

"What have I done?" Malinin retorted perkily. "You mean falling asleep like that? But that was a law of nature!"

"I'm not talking about laws of nature. I'm asking you why you made us turn into ants, instead of drones."

"If you were about to be pinned in someone's butterfly collection, you wouldn't be too worried about what you turned into..."

I didn't say anything to Malinin about that, because there was more than a grain of truth in it.

"Anyway, Barankin," Kostya continued, "drones are sort of ants, only with wings, and you and I don't want wings. We've had enough of wings to last us a long time. Let's just crrrawl away from everything and everyone into the ground, into an ant-hill. No one will bother us there, no young nature-lovers, or swots, or cats or sparrows..."

"How can you rest in an ant-hill!" I let fly at Malinin. His idiotic ideas really annoyed me. " 'Crrrawl away' indeed! Don't you know that ants are the most hard-working insects in the world? They are forced to work by their, what is it, their instinct."

"Of course, I know!" Malinin tried to defend himself. "I know perfectly well that ants are hard-working. Only today's Sunday!"

This statement by Kostya Malinin took me quite unawares.

"So what?" I asked.

"They probably don't work on Sundays!"

"So you think that an ant's instinct stops working on Sundays, do you?"

"You know what, Barankin," Malinin said in a very confident voice, "I don't believe they have any instinct at all."

"What do you mean?" I said. "They taught us about it at school."

"So what? The teachers just pretend it exists, so they can ask us questions about it in the lessons! See?"

After Kostya Malinin had explained it all to me, I began to think perhaps he was right and ants didn't have any instinct, but they did have Sundays... And if they did have Sundays, there was nothing terrible about us turning into ants instead of drones... Ants must have Sundays! But say they didn't? I tried to imagine a life without Sundays and could not. I remembered a talk that a doctor had given at our school. About how important it was to rest on Sundays. If people were supposed to rest on Sundays, it was even more important for ants, because they were such tiny, weak little things. Yes, of course ants must have Sundays! And if they did, everything was alright! And we could keep our peckers up, that is, our whiskers, and crawl into an ant-hill and bag a room for ourselves, and stand on our heads and do anything we felt like. These thoughts cheered me up immensely.

"Malinin!" I said, jumping from the twig onto the ground. "You and I'll go and find an ant-hill, get ourselves a room in it, lock the door and..."

"I shouldn't think they have doors and locks in the rooms," said Kostya doubtfully.

"Never mind!" I said, even more cheerfully than before. "The important thing is that there are rooms. We'll find some way of keeping everybody out! You and I are battle-seasoned butterflies, wise old birds, you won't catch us with chaff!"

I ran along the ground and out of sheer delight kicked a round seed shaped rather like a football lying in my path.

Kostya Malinin received it and passed it back to me. It was only here, on the ground, that I took a good look at Kostya. He was shining all over, as if he had been cleaned with shoe polish, his waist was very funny, awfully thin like a girl's, and he had six legs. "It's great that an ant has six legs," I thought. "Very convenient for playing football. Especially for scoring goals. And it's good for the goal-keeper too. You stand on two legs, and you've got four to catch the ball with..."

To prove my point I jumped into the air and caught the seed-cum-ball gracefully with all four legs at once, pressing it to my chest. Then I fell down, clutching the ball, and rolled about chuckling loudly with delight.

"Pile in, lads!" shouted Kostya Malinin and dived on top of me. We were just about to start turning somersaults, when I noticed about

six ants coming out of the forest, that is, the grass, towards us. I was delighted, of course, and jumped up.

"Hi, there!" I called to the ants, lifting up all four legs as a sign of peace. "Care for a quick game of football, since it's Sunday, fellers? How many are there of you? Six? And two of us! Just right! We'll split into two teams of four. Bags I'm centre forward!"

The real ants gave me a rather strange look, slapped one another with their whiskers, whispered together, backed away and disappeared quietly into the undergrowth.

Kostya and I ran after them. There was no sign of them in the nearby forest, that is, the grass, but right next to it at the foot of a grassy knoll, we found a path that was absolutely crawling with ants.

The ants were scurrying back and forth. Some of the smaller ones were carrying little balls of earth, twigs, small leaves and pine needles. The broad-shouldered ones with large heads and huge jaws were dragging caterpillars, dead flies and beetles...

"What are they doing?" I asked Malinin anxiously. "Working, do you think?"

"Of course not, Barankin," Malinin replied. "They're taking a walk down their high street."

"Taking a walk?" I echoed doubtfully.

"Yes. It's Sunday."

"Well, why are they carrying all those bits of wood and stone if it's Sunday?"

Malinin said nothing.

"I think they're working, not taking a walk..."

"Don't be daft, Barankin," retorted Malinin angrily. "How can they be working on Sunday?"

"But what about those logs on their shoulders?" I asked.

"What about them," said Malinin. "Well, that's just one of their customs, to take a walk with logs on their shoulders."

"One of their customs?" I repeated. Rubbing my eyes with my legs, I took a good look at the ants, and my heart sank with most unpleasant foreboding.

This sensation was produced both by what I saw and by something Malinin said when he was looking at the ant-hill.

"You know, Barankin," he said. "Let's not go to the ant-hill, let's go for a walk on our own over there..." He waved in the opposite direction.

In fact that was just what I had wanted to suggest to Kostya, only he suggested it first, so without a moment's hesitation I replied:

"Okay, Malinin! Switch on, Malinin, and go into reverse." I wanted to add "before it's too late", but refrained.

We were about to back away from the ant-hill, when a very strange thing happened to the two of us: instead of backing away, we began to move forward, right towards the ant-hill. I could feel clearly that I was doing this against my will, I could sense and understand this, but I couldn't do anything about it, because some invisible force was drawing Kostya and me slowly, step by step, towards the ant-hill.

Event No. 28

WE REPAIR THE ANT-HILL

Slowly and reluctantly, against our will, me and Kostya moved towards the scurrying ants, and with each step it became clearer to me that all the ants, without exception, were busy working, in spite of the fact that for humans this was a day of rest.

The ants were working, toiling away like mad, and there was no point in denying it. Without realising it we were now in the very thick of them, so close that we could even hear them panting hard under their heavy loads. Beside us, for example, a whole team was dragging a huge dragon-fly home. And although the ants in the team were fussing like girls getting in one another's way and even pulling the dragon-fly in opposite directions, in spite of this the dragon-fly was miraculously being transported slowly towards the ant-hill.

"The ants are working," I said to Kostya.

And working they were! Every man jack of them! Not a single one was looking around, or doing something else, chatting, playing, lying under a bush or sunbathing. And the main thing was that nobody was giving orders, nobody was yelling at anybody, like our Zina Fokina did. You should hear the racket she makes when we're supposed to help tidy the playground.

"They're working!" I said to Kostya Malinin.

"Well, what if they are?" Kostya snapped back. "They're stupid, that's what. Uneducated, ignorant. They probably don't even know what Sunday is. But you and me are educated. You and me aren't going to work."

"So the instinct must exist too," I said in a serious voice. "If they're obeying it, IT must exist!"

"Well, let them obey it! We won't obey anybody!" Kostya Malinin's voice said stubbornly.

Like Kostya Malinin, I too was quite convinced that you needn't necessarily obey an instinct even if it did exist... So you can imagine my surprise when quite unexpectedly I felt a tremendous urge to go and work with those ignorant and uneducated ants. The urge was strong and quite irresistible. I felt that if I didn't hoist some heavy load onto my shoulder that very minute and start labouring like all the ants, I would drop dead on the spot.

Picking up a dry twig from the ground, I silently hoisted it onto my shoulder and started dragging it towards the ant-hill. I immediately



felt better, as if a great weight had been lifted off my mind! I even felt quite pleased and cheerful. At that moment the same thing happened to Kostya Malinin, or rather, at first, when I hoisted the twig onto my back, he looked at me as if I was crazy, then suddenly without a word he took hold of the other end of the twig with great energy and enthusiasm and helped me carry it, tripping and stumbling with every step he took.

The twig was as heavy as a real log. It kept getting caught in grass and stones and sliding off our shoulders, but we went on dragging it, puffing and panting, with the greatest of pleasure, until at last we reached the underground entrance to the ant-hill. By the entrance two ants took the log from us and dragged it away into the darkness, while me and Kostya obediently turned round and scurried off for some more building materials.

So there! That was how me and Kostya joined the ants in their "walk" and began to "walk" with them carrying all sorts of rubbish, scurrying first away from the ant-hill then back to it. To and fro! To and fro! With twigs and pine needles on our backs, dry leaves, balls of earth we rushed about like robots and even stopped talking to each other, so engrossed were we in our labours.

To be honest, working in obedience to your instinct is very dull, I would even say, stupid. The same words seem to bore into your head all the time: "Come on, Barankin! Hurry up! Carry it. Drag it! Take it back, Barankin! Get a move on, Barankin!" But WHY carry it? WHAT FOR? You can't think. Something stops you from thinking, and this makes you feel a fool, a real cretin... Only once did I start to think. That was when I got sick of carrying logs, and improvised a kind of barrow for me and Kostya, but the weird sensation in my head did not stop, and the words "Come on, Barankin! Hurry up! Carry it! Drag it! Take it back!" kept boring duly into my brain.

The next time I started to think was when I wanted to ask Malinin (since he had got me into this mess) how long this beastly instinct would keep pushing us around, but then with great difficulty I remembered reading a book recently called "The Pass-Word of the Crossed Antennae" which stated quite unequivocally that the ants' instinct makes them work right up to sunset.

Perhaps me and Kostya would have got used to the ant conveyor belt that day and worked until the sun went down, if something had not happened when, for the twentieth or thirtieth time, we were returning with our barrow to the ant-hill. Just at that moment who should walk

past our (sic!) ant-hill than Venka Smirnov. That did not bode well, of course. I barely had time to think this, when, whistling gaily, Venka jabbed his spade handle into the ant-hill twice and went on his way, still whistling.

What happened to us then? To "us"... I mean not only to me and Kostya, but to all the ants. You can't imagine what happened to us! As if in response to some kind of command, we all got so alarmed and agitated that we rushed about frantically to break all the records for repairing our ant-hill. It was as if Venka had made our instincts "switch" us all from first gear into top, which was why we all started working ten times faster.

When I sensed all this, I wanted badly to give Malinin a clout with the barrow, but in spite of this strong urge I could not, because the other side of the barrow was being carried by Malinin himself and the words kept boring into my brain ten times more strongly: "Come on, Barankin! Hurry up! Carry it faster! Drag it quicker! Get a move on! Come on, Barankin! Faster! Come on! Faster! Faster!" And also because, no matter how angry I was with Kostya, I could never not only hit him, but even lay a finger on him.

And there he was rushing about with me in top gear, and probably with the same insistent message boring into his miserable head, "Hurry up, Malinin! Come on! Carry it faster! Drag it quicker! Get a move on! Come on, Malinin! Make it snappy! Quick march!"

Event No. 29

THE ONLY "MUTINY" OF ITS KIND EVER!

So this was the end!

The end of everything! Of all my hopes, dreams and fantasies! I now knew for sure that the sort of life I had dreamed of on the bench waiting for Misha Yakovlev did not and could not exist anywhere—not on the earth or under it. Not for sparrows, or butterflies, or ants! And probably not for drones either. And doing nothing probably didn't exist either, because even if me and Kostya were drones, instead of ants, we would try to do nothing, and in order to do nothing, as I had discovered from bitter experience, you usually had to do so much that it would have been better to do something...

That sort of life did not exist! So there was no point in looking for

it! And no point in wasting all that time! It simply did NOT exist. If this was the case, why did me and my best friend Kostya Malinin continue to be ants? Why were we rushing about in top gear mending an ant-hill in which we had no intention of living? It was time to stop. Time to go back, before we had any more nasty surprises. At any moment something could happen to all these birds and insects that would make you run for dear life. I looked at Kostya Malinin. He was silent, not asking me anything, not blaming me for having landed him in such a mess for the third time running, not reproaching me or cursing me, and that was intolerable. It would have been much better if he had let fly at me.

But Kostya said nothing, as if he had lost his tongue. He scurried about, loading, unloading, loading up again and then unloading, fetching, carrying, to and fro, never lagging behind. Kostya was working like a model ant.

"We must stop this!" I thought. "Stop work at once and have a rest. We must save our energy for getting back. Or our instinct will wear us out so much by evening, that we won't be able to move... Let the ordinary ants obey their instinct blindly. Malinin and I will show IT that we are intelligent beings. We'll prove it! But how are we to prove it, if I've hardly got a grain of intelligence left in my head! And no other thoughts except 'Push! Pull! Carry! Hurry!' So I'll push, pull, carry and hurry, but mentally order myself: 'Think, Barankin! Think! Use your brains to spite your instinct! Don't obey it! Don't follow it!'"

And just as I was thinking "don't obey it", I suddenly had an idea for a mutiny, perhaps the only one of its kind in the whole world. I decided to organise a real revolt, a real mutiny against instinct!

I stopped in mid-air with a handful of pine needles. I stood up on my hind legs. I straightened my tired back. And I cried out loudly for the whole battle-field to hear, like Peter the Great before Poltava.

"Malinin," I ordered. "Drop that rubbish! That's it!"

"That's what?" asked Kostya in a listless sort of voice.

"A revolt! That's what we'll have! A mutiny!"

"A mutiny against what?"

"Against INSTINCT! A mutiny against INSTINCT!"

"But what's a mutiny?" asked Malinin.

Just listen to that! Kostya must have started to lose his powers of reason, if he was already forgetting the meaning of ordinary human

words. So I quickly reminded him what the word "mutiny" meant and explained to him all about it. Kostya listened to me apathetically and asked dully:

"What sort of mutiny?"

"What do you mean 'what sort'? An ordinary one! That is, not an ordinary one, a deadly one, that's what sort. See?"

"But what does deadly mean?" Kostya asked me again.

"Deadly means that you and me would rather die than obey our instinct!"

"But what does 'not obey' mean? How can we not obey?" Kostya looked at me with a sad expression and sighed sceptically.

"It's easy! You see, it, our instinct, will try to load us up, you and me. You understand 'load up', do you?"

"Oh, yes, I can understand 'load up'," said Kostya.

"Fine!" I said happily. "Well, this instinct will load us up and try to make us work, but we, you and I, will not obey it. Understand 'not obey it'?"

"But how will we not obey it?"

"Well, we just won't! Like this! Look!"

I threw down the bundle of pine needles I had been carrying on my back. Kostya Malinin first stared at me, as if I were an ant nut-case, thought for a moment with obvious difficulty and quietly put his birch leaf on the ground. Then the two of us ran off the ant path not carrying anything. Instinct immediately tried to make me pick up some pine needles, of course, but I did not obey it. Kostya Malinin was standing beside me, all tensed up, when suddenly he started turning on the spot like a dog chasing its tail.

"Why are you running round in circles?" I asked Malinin.

"I want to go back and pick up the leaf," whispered Malinin.

"Don't you dare do that. Get the better of it!"

"I am getting the better of it."

"Good lad!" I praised him and crawled under a tuft of grass. "Come here."

Breathing heavily and trying all the while to resist his instinct, Kostya managed to crawl up to me with great difficulty and clung onto me with all six legs. I got hold of a birch leaf and put it over us like a blanket, so no one would see.

"And now," I said in a feverish whisper, "now, Malinin, concentrate and repeat after me:

*Oh, the last thing that I want
Is to be a little ant!
What I want from now on
Is to be a human being."*

With a loud sob, Kostya sighed deeply and instead of the magic spell said:

"Oh, help!"

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Someone's pulling at my leg!"

I thought it was Kostya's instinct, trying to get the better of him again, of course. Lifting the birch leaf slightly, I peered out and saw, not an instinct, but a strange ant who had grabbed hold of Kostya's leg and was tugging with all its might...

Event No. 30

SOMETHING QUITE UNHEARD-OF IN THE ANT-HILL

I thought I would manage to get rid of the ant pretty quickly, but I was wrong. The ant proved to be very persistent. It grabbed hold of one of my legs too.

"Let go, or you'll be sorry!" I shouted threateningly. But it went on pulling, then began to tug, and pulled the blanket, that is, the birch leaf off us. I got furious, of course, and jumped up; the elderly ant tapped us all over with its whiskers, like a doctor, and asked:

"Aren't you feeling well?"

"I've never felt better," I said.

"Then why are you lying down?"

"We're having a rest!"

"Why are you resting when everyone else is working?"

"Because it's Sunday," I said.

"What's Sunday?" the ant asked mystified.

"A day off," I explained.

"What day off? Why is it a day off?"

"It's a day for having a rest," I said.

The news that two ants had lain down to have a nap when there was so much work to be done flew round the ant-hill in no time. It was

so unheard of that all the ants gathered to take a look at us. Some formed a tight circle round me and Kostya in the clearing and goggled at us, while others climbed up the flowers and grass and stared down on us from above.

"What is a day off?" the meticulous ant went on interrogating me.

"A day off is a day when no one works," I began to explain to the assembled company, but the more I tried to explain to them, the less they understood. "Actually," I said, "when we lived there, we never worked on this day."

"Where's that—'there'?"

"Over there!" I waved a leg in the direction of a large block of flats. "Over there... In that big ant-hill, I mean, man-hill..."

I got all muddled up and stopped talking. Voices came from the crowd of ants:

"It's very suspicious!"

"Who are they?"

"This must be investigated."

"Don't investigate them, just pull their legs off!"

"They're not like us. They're different. They don't even talk like us!"

"This must be investigated!"

While the old ants conferred among themselves about what to do with us, the crowd continued to mutter. While the crowd continued to mutter, and the old ants to confer, I managed to whisper to Kostya:

"Malinin! Repeat these words after me before it's too late:

*Oh, the last thing that I want
Is to be a little ant.*

But Malinin seemed to have gone deaf. He was staring in horror at the old ants conferring in a huddle and didn't hear me.

Then I stopped talking too. I had to, because at that moment the old ants finished their conferring and one of them came up to me and Kostya again with the words "Listen, everyone!"

"Listen, everyone!" it said. "These two ants here," the old ant pointed in our direction. "These two idlers stopped work in broad Daylight, without waiting for the Moon. Without waiting for the Sunset, they stopped work and lay down to sleep, covering themselves with a birch leaf. I am an old ant, but never have I heard from our elders of such a crime, taking place in our ant-hill."

The crowd gave a threatening roar.

"Listen, everyone!" the old ant repeated. "The Council of Elders has decreed that these two criminals be sentenced to Death!"

The crowd of ants roared its approval. Before Kostya Malinin had time to squeak in protest, ten brawny ants came up to us. Without a word, they grabbed us by the legs, picked us up and carried us away from the ant-hill.

Event No. 31

WHAT MIRMIKS ARE AND WHAT KOSTYA MALININ IS MADE OF

I don't know how it would all have ended (I daren't think, in fact) if an ant sitting on a long flower hadn't cried out:

"The Mirmiks are coming! The Mirmiks are coming!"

At the word Mirmiks the ants who were carrying me and Kostya shuddered strangely from head to foot and dropped us onto the ground. Then they scurried off in all directions, waving their quivering whiskers and kicking up their legs in a most amusing way. It was rather like savages doing a war dance. Tapping one another with their whiskers, getting up on their hind legs, dancing a few steps and assuming terrible, threatening poses, the ants kept chanting one after another the strange, incomprehensible word that the ant on the flower had cried out: "Mirmiks! Mirmiks!" Then they dropped down on all fours and rushed into the clumps of grass for dear life, quite forgetting about me and Kostya. Before you could say Jack Robinson, they had all vanished behind blades of grass. The clearing was quite empty. We were alone.

I don't know why, but for some reason I began to feel the same sense of panic that had seized the ants at the word "Mirmiks".

"Follow me! Only keep quiet... Don't make a noise," I told Kostya Malinin, climbing up a nearby flower to take a look around.

"Why keep quiet?" asked Malinin, scrambling after me.

"Just in case," I said, never dreaming that exactly a minute later my caution would save our lives. "Climb higher."

"What do you think I'm doing?" snapped Malinin.

Clambering onto a leaf, I was about to crawl further up when suddenly down below I saw a lame black ant and the rest of our "bearers". They were backing rather strangely out of the thick grass. Spreading out in

a line, they came to a halt. Kostya and I lifted our heads and watched the black ants' strange behaviour in silence. They stood motionless, like soldiers prepared to do battle, and at that moment out of a grass copse marched about fifteen brawny ginger ants and also halted.

What happened after this was like a war newsreel.

The ginger ants rushed at the black ones like mad dogs, snapping their huge jaws like pincers. Before I could blink an eyelid, the black ants' heads were rolling along the ground like ninepins. Of all the black-ant soldiers only the lame one was left. It was obviously the most experienced, hardened soldier, so deftly was it fighting off the two ginger ants attacking it. It even managed to grab hold of one of them by the whiskers and send it spinning like a top with pain, but at this moment another two ginger reinforcement ants came to their aid, seized the lame ant by the hind legs and stretched it out on the ground.

The black ant tried to throw them off, but then another ginger ant jumped on its back and that was the end of it.

The ginger ants surveyed the scene triumphantly, twirled their whiskers and began to brush off the dust and tidy themselves up.

I crawled back from the edge of the leaf, sensing that instinct, the same instinct that Kostya and I had overcome a little while ago, had begun to awake in me, and not only to awake, but also to send me into the fray to help the black-headed ants. Another second and I would have jumped down from the flower onto the backs of the ginger Mirmiks, but I did not. I took myself in hand and overcame my instinct, as before, because it was obviously telling me to do something quite stupid, sending me to fight a whole regiment of Mirmiks single-handed. And I knew for sure that if I attacked the ginger-heads, instinct would also make Kostya join in the battle, and one thing was certain, Malinin would not get the best of it in a skirmish with the Mirmiks.

While I was mentally fighting against my instinct, the Mirmiks hid in the thick grass, and the clearing became empty again. Trying not to make a noise, me and Kostya tiptoed quickly up to the top of the flower and almost gasped with horror. The ginger ants had now encircled the ant-hill completely. A fierce battle was in progress in the grass and clearings.

"It's war, Malinin!" I said.

"Yes, it is, Barankin!" said Kostya Malinin.

Although there were far fewer ginger soldiers on the battle-field, they were tougher, stronger and far more experienced than the black

ants. Slowly, step by step, they pushed back the black ants, who retreated towards the ant-hill. The clearings captured by the brown Mirmiks were strewn with black bodies. They lay on the ground in all sorts of poses. The wounded twitched their legs and moved their jaws weakly.

"The rotters!" Malinin cried out suddenly, getting up on his hind legs. "The rotters! Fancy killing the little ones."

I grabbed Malinin by the leg just in case and dragged him back from the edge of our observation point.

Meanwhile the battle was getting fiercer. The ants were grabbing their adversaries' legs, tripping them up, biting off their whiskers and seizing hold of their throats in a deathly bulldog-like grip.

"Come on, black-bellies! Don't be scared! Give it to the ginger rotters!" shouted Kostya, slipping free of my grasp. "Death to the invaders!"

The black-bellies were doing very well indeed. They had managed to stand up to the Mirmiks very quickly and were now fighting like lions, using their numerical superiority. In fives or sixes they would leap on a giant ginger ant, throw it to the ground by its legs or whiskers, and finish it off.

"Let them have it! That's the way!" I howled with all my might.

"Come on, black-bellies!" shouted Kostya.

"Hooray!" the two of us cried.

The ginger ants had faltered and begun to retreat.

I put two fingers in my mouth and gave a piercing whistle. Kostya was jumping up and down with joy, when he suddenly stopped dead.

"Look!" he said, staring in the opposite direction from the ant-hill.

I looked down and saw in the distance a huge army of Mirmik reinforcements coming to their aid. At the very moment when the black ants had forced the ginger ones to retreat all along the line. If this army of brown-heads did come to their aid, it would be the end of the black ants. And of me and Kostya too: after all, we were black ants as well! There was war all round us, and we had sat down to watch it as if we were at the cinema.

If Kostya and I had been humans instead of ants, we could really have helped the black ants, but what could we do for them in our present state. Yet perhaps we could do something after all? What if we took command of the black ants? Perhaps that would change things. They had wanted to put me and Kostya to death, of course, but never mind! It had been a matter of necessity, nothing personal. In fact they

were good chaps! And they fought well, too, only a bit too instinctively. They didn't bother to think things out, and they hadn't got anyone in command. It was each man for himself, but if they had a commander they'd be able to show those ginger Mirmiks a thing or two.

What if we really did take command of them? I would be commander-in-chief and Kostya would be my chief-of-staff. No, he'd probably be too scared. What sort of chief-of-staff would he make? The best thing was to turn into humans as quickly as possible and chase these ginger-heads away from the ant-hill.

"Malinin!" I ordered, not taking my eyes off the fighting. "Repeat after me, Malinin!"

*Oh, the last thing that I want
Is to be a little ant.
All I want from now on
Is to be a human being.*

"Follow me, Barankin! Death to the Mirmiks!" I heard Kostya Malinin shout wildly behind me.

I turned round, but it was too late. With the words "Follow me, Barankin! Death to the Mirmiks!" Kostya jumped down from the flower and, grabbing a twig-cudgel as he ran, rushed off towards the advancing regiment of ginger-ant invaders to join up with the black ants.

Event No. 32

WE ARE SURROUNDED

"Instinct!" the thought flashed through my head. Could it really be that Kostya Malinin's instinct had awoken and not only awoken, but driven him into battle? No! I knew Kostya too well to think that. In real life Kostya was not all that brave, and no instinct could make him get involved in a fight. This time it was the HUMAN BEING in Kostya that had awoken. Just as it should in any person who sees big bullies being nasty to little creatures, especially such likeable and hard-working creatures as the black-bellied ants. Yes, it was the HUMAN BEING that had awoken in Kostya. Oh, Malinin! Malinin! Good lad, Malinin! He'd picked up my thoughts at a distance and rushed right into the thick of the fighting to help the black ants. Without a moment's

hesitation I too jumped off the flower and sped off after Malinin, down the hillside.

From the hill you could see clearly how the huge detachment of ginger-heads were advancing to cut off the black ants from the rear. We must somehow warn OUR LOT, but, instead of going to join up with the black ants, Malinin for some reason suddenly veered off to the left and went rushing furiously towards the Mirmiks who were advancing on all sides.

"Kostya!" I yelled as I ran. "Wait, Malinin. That's not the right way. Where do you think you're going? They'll kill you! Kostya! Stop!"

But Kostya Malinin did not pay the slightest attention to my shouts.

"Forward! Into battle! Death to the fascists!" he squealed, shaking his cudgel and putting on a spurt. He was galloping along frantically like a wild horse, sending up clouds of dust behind him.

Seeing the black ant crossing their path, the detachment of Mirmiks immediately changed direction. Realigning themselves as they went, after rapid consultations the Mirmiks began to advance swiftly on Kostya Malinin. Any minute now, they would meet, and severed by a huge pair of ginger jaws Malinin's head would roll on the grass... Forming a semi-circle round Malinin, who was galloping furiously towards them, the Mirmiks cut us off completely from our own forces.

It was now just a matter of speed. In three gigantic strides I caught up Kostya, grabbed his hind legs and dragged him away from the hill towards a small stream. Ferrying us across the raging torrent on a birch leaf, I dragged Malinin by the legs onto the bank and hid him in the grass while our pursuers came out on the opposite bank. For greater safety I dragged him further into the forest and then shook him off my back.

Kostya sat there on the grass with a crazed expression in his eyes as if he was still mentally advancing on the Mirmiks.

"Hey, soldier boy!" I said, pulling the twig-cudgel out of his grasp with great difficulty. "What are you playing at! I'll give you such a hiding. That'll teach you to go charging off! You should have tried to join up with our lads, but you... Oh, Malinin!"

I might really have given Kostya a good hiding, if I had not caught sight of a ginger Mirmik in the grass at that moment. I looked round. Another ginger head popped out of the bushes, gnashing its huge jaws

savagely. Ginger ants appeared on either side of it. Well, I never! So they had managed to get over the stream too, and to encircle us into the bargain.

"Climb up that flower!" I whispered quietly to Malinin. "Concentrate hard and turn into a human being at once!"

"But what about you?"

"I'll give you cover. You can see what a fix we're in. Do as I say."

Kostya nipped up the stalk with me following behind. The Mirmiks heard us and looked up. One of them even stood on his hind legs to get a better look.

"Higher," I whispered to Kostya. "They've seen us, the devils! Climb right onto the flower itself and turn into a human being there..."

While Malinin was clambering onto the petals, the Mirmiks surrounded the stem and one by one began to climb up silently after us.

Event No. 33

TEN BIGGUNS AGAINST TWO LITTLUNS AND A COBWEB AEROPLANE

"Hey, you lot!" I shouted, hanging from a leaf. "Ten bigguns against two littluns... Aren't you ashamed of yourselves?"

The Mirmiks went on climbing the stem in complete silence. At a distance of two or three centimeters from me they stopped and started gnashing their jaws. "I wonder if Malinin will have time to change into a human being or not?" I thought, tossing the cudgel from one paw to another. "Without me he'll never do a thing..."

"Hey, Ginger!" I shouted to the brawniest Mirmik. "How about fighting it out, just the two of us? I challenge you!"

Without saying a word, the ginger ant stepped forward and opened its jaws. I took a swing and bashed it on the head with all my might. It swayed and fell silently to the ground. Its place was immediately taken by two more ginger ants.

I was just getting ready to welcome them, when suddenly I heard Malinin's voice above me.

"Look out, Yuri! There's a third one creeping up behind you..."

I climbed onto a daisy leaf, knocked the three Mirmiks off the stalk with three blows and called out:

"Why haven't you turned into a human being, Malinin? Why didn't you do as I told you?"

"I'm not going to turn into anything without you!" Kostya's voice hissed from above.

"Oh, yes, you are!" I yelled, trying to fight off the Mirmiks and climbing onto the petals of the daisy.

This was the end. There was no escape now. There were Mirmiks down below, the sky up above, and me and Kostya in the middle.

"Why won't you change into a human being?" I shouted to Malinin. But at that moment a ginger head peered round a petal, rolling its eyes ferociously. "Turn into a human being at once, Malinin!" I brought the twig down on the Mirmik's skull.

The Mirmik disappeared.

"Only if we do it together!" said Malinin.

Another Mirmik head appeared on the other side from the abyss.

"There isn't time!" I stabbed the ant with my twig as if it were a sword.

The ant disappeared.

"Well, I won't on my own!" said Malinin.

I swung out with all my might, cursed and bashed the Mirmik so hard that the twig snapped. The Mirmik crashed to the ground, and instead of my tough cudgel I was left holding a little broken-off piece of twig.

Kostya and I retreated to the middle of the daisy. We had nothing more to defend ourselves with and the Mirmiks seemed to guess this. Four ginger heads appeared on different sides. Kostya and I clung to each other.

"This is the end!" said Malinin. "Goodbye, Barankin!"

I didn't even try to reassure my best friend, because it really did look as if we'd had it. There were Mirmiks down below, the sky up above, and me and Kostya in the middle. If only we could jump over to the next flower, but it was too far... The only other thing was to leap down to the ground, but that was exactly what the Mirmiks in the grass below were waiting for. The number of times me and Kostya had managed to escape in the nick of time by the skin of our teeth! Surely I could think of a way out this time too. Surely me and Kostya weren't going to die in such a stupid way here, on a daisy, just a few steps away from real human life. Could ALL that we had learnt, felt and suffered be in vain!



"Hang on, Malinin! We'll show those Mirmiks how real lads fight to the last!"

I stood up on my hind legs to give a fitting welcome to the next batch of Mirmiks, and hit my head against a cobweb that was taut in the wind. It had got stuck on a petal and was now flapping over the daisy, like a thread from a magic flying carpet.

"Malinin!" I yelled to Kostya, and Kostya understood at once.

He hopped smartly onto the cobweb, with me following. All we had to do now was bite through the thread that was holding it. This I did, and the cobweb floated off at the very moment when four Mirmiks were about to pounce on us on all sides. One who had clearly intended to bite off my head merely scraped his jaws along one of my legs. Four pairs of jaws, each like a terrible trap, snapped viciously, but it was too late. Me and Kostya were flying up into the sky. I looked down at the clearing and couldn't believe my eyes: while me and Malinin had been fighting for our lives against overwhelmingly superior forces of ginger ants, the black ants had managed to make mincemeat of the Mirmiks and had returned to their normal routine.

The war had ended as unexpectedly as it had begun, and the only reminders that a few minutes ago the most terrible battle had been fought in these clearings were a few wounded ants and the corpse-bearers dragging the dead bodies away from the ant-hill. The thread from the flying cobweb carpet carried me and Kostya farther and farther away from the daisy in the direction of the ant-hill.

*Oh, the last thing that I want
Is to be a little ant!*

I sang out loudly, at the top of my voice.

All I want from now on,

Malinin continued,

Is to be a human being!

At that very moment I heard a terrible whistle behind me. A strong gust of wind blew me upside down, spun me round like a top and pulled me off the cobweb. Turning head over heels several times, I saw a huge bird swoop down, peck up Kostya Malinin and soar away with him...

When I realised what had happened, I went dizzy, fainted and fell senseless on the ground...

Part five

BE A MAN, BARANKIN!

Event No. 34

A VOICE FROM THE "HEREAFTER"

I don't know how long I lay unconscious on the grass, probably quite some time, but when I gradually began to regain consciousness, I went on lying there as if I were still in a faint.

I lay there delirious. Everything that me and Kostya had been through together came back to me in a monstrous jumble. I tried to open my eyes, but it made no difference—either it was night or I had gone blind.

Then I began to think of Kostya.

Kostya was dead, but in my memory he was as alive as ever. My memory brought my best friend to life again, albeit for a brief moment, and this made me feel a bit better. Why hadn't that rotten bird gobbled me up? After all, it was me who had got Kostya mixed up in all this, yet I was alive and Kostya was dead. He had died as an ant without having time to turn into a human being! At first I thought I was right, but on reflection I decided I was wrong after all. What did it mean to say that Kostya had died as an ant without having time to turn into a human being? To me he was always a human being no matter what he had changed into. Kostya had sped to the aid of the ants as a human being. He had refused to leave me alone! He hadn't wanted to turn into anything without me! He hadn't been afraid of the Mirmiks! If Era Kuzyakina had seen how bravely Kostya Malinin fought in the ant war, she would have devoted the whole issue of the class news-sheet to him, and if Alik Novikov were an ant photo-correspondent, he would have used up reels of film on him too.

Yes, Kostya Malinin had been a human being all the time, and he had died as one too. There was no need for him to whisper any magic words, or for him to want to turn into a human being, because he was one already! Yes! Kostya Malinin had definitely become a man, but what about me? It was hard to talk about myself, of course, and difficult for me to judge whether I had behaved like a human being

in relation to Kostya Malinin or not... Perhaps I had just remained an ant after all? Perhaps... But to tell the truth I really had tried not to let him down. After all it was because of Kostya that the Mirmiks had almost beheaded me lots of times. The very last time they had missed my head and gashed one of my legs, fortunately, but it was still aching quite hard.

With a foreleg I cautiously stroked the back leg that the Mirmik had bitten, and started up in surprise. This time I wasn't stroking an ant's back leg with an ant's foreleg, but a human leg with a human hand, at least that's what I seemed to be doing. Then I opened my eyes and saw an ordinary boy's leg instead of an ant's back leg. It was my leg, and the scratch on which the blood had just dried was a reminder that only a short time ago this leg had been an ant's leg. And my hands were real hands again. And my head? My head was back on my shoulders too.

I lay in the grass a little longer to recover properly, then sat up for a bit, then got up, brushed down my trousers, stuck my hands in my pockets and set off home like a human being. I walked, staring hard at the tops of my boots and not raising my eyes. My head was buzzing and my whole body ached like mad, as if I had been beaten with cudgels, and the leg that had been bitten by the Mirmik was so painful I could hardly step on it. Five or six times I bumped into passers-by who said: "Look where you're going, lad!" as if I were gazing up at the sky, instead of down at the ground.

I don't remember how I managed to reach our courtyard, because all the way I walked in a dream and only came to when I bumped against the gate.

Without taking my hands out of my pockets, I kicked the gate open, walked up to the bench and sat down. Everything in the yard was just as usual. Chirpy clusters of sparrows flying off the acacia tree, butterflies fluttering over the flower-bed, and black ants crawling over the bench. Everything was in its place. Except Kostya Malinin, who wasn't there and never would be. And I wasn't there either. At least I was there, but I was quite a different person. As I sat on the bench I was not myself at all, I kept thinking that I had just come back from a very long and perilous journey, on which I had set off with my friend Kostya Malinin many, many years ago. And from which I had returned alone. And now I would be alone all my life, completely alone.

I covered my face with my hands and began to cry for the first time

in my life. The tears ran down my cheeks, my hands, my neck and even my stomach. I sat there and howled, with the tears streaming down. I was surprised that a person could shed so many tears. But that person had never cried before in his whole life, all those tears could have piled up inside him in that time.

"What on earth are you blubbering about, Barankin?" the voice of Kostya Malinin floated down from somewhere high up.

Event No. 35

WE EXIST!

"Kostya," I said, my tears forgotten. "Is that you?"

"Yes," said Kostya Malinin's voice from overhead. His voice was hollow and faint, as if it were coming from the sky.

"Are you already ... there?"

"Where?"

"Oh, you know, in the hereafter, eh?"

"What hereafter? I'm sitting on the fence, not in any hereafter, or whatever you said."

"Don't go having me on, Malinin. I saw that bird gobble you up with my own eyes. And if it gobbled you up, how can you be sitting on the fence?"

"Who did the bird gobble up? Me? It was you who got gobbled up, not me. I saw it with my own eyes."

"No, it was you!"

"How could it have gobbled me up, if I'm alive and sitting on the fence? Open your eyes and have a look!"

"Say I'm afraid to?"

"Afraid to what?"

"Say I open my eyes, and you don't exist?" I said and burst into tears again.

"Alright," said the voice of Kostya Malinin from above, "now you'll see whether I exist or not!"

Somewhere overhead something moved noisily, then leapt onto my shoulders.

I fell off the bench and opened my eyes. Kostya Malinin was alive alright, and no doubt about it. He was sitting astride me, pummeling me in the ribs and chanting:

"Do I exist or don't I? Do I exist or don't I?"

"You do!" I yelled, and me and Kostya rolled over on the grass strewn with yellow leaves. "Kostya Malinin of the Malinin species does exist! Hooray! Hooray! Yippee!"

"So we do exist, do we?"

"Yes, we do!"

"As what?"

"As human beings."

"We're human beings!"

"Hooray!" we shouted together in delight and hugged each other again.

"Wait a minute," I said to Kostya. "Let me take a look at you."

"What's the matter, Yuri?" Kostya laughed. "Haven't you ever seen me before?"

"No, I haven't!" I said. "I haven't seen you before and you haven't seen the real me before either. And what's even more important, I haven't seen myself before and you haven't seen yourself."

We looked at each other in silence. Kostya looked at me, and I looked





at Kostya. I didn't just look at him, but I examined him all over, from head to foot, as some amazing miracle of nature. For example, I stared at Kostya's hands, covered in battle scars and scratches. Before I would never have taken any notice of my own or anyone else's hands, of course. What's so marvellous about hands! But now I couldn't take my eyes off them. They were quite something! More than an ant's leg or a sparrow's wing! Have you ever really looked at your hands? Some boys might have, but I know that girls only pay attention to their faces.

And what about heads! I have never taken much notice of my head either. What's so marvellous about a head! It's there on you shoulders, and that's all there is to it. You pull your cap on it! You use it to do a bit of day-dreaming, and that's all! But now... After everything I had been through, I knew for sure that if human hands are a miracle, the human head is the miracle to end all miracles. Even Venka Smirnov's head was a miracle. Only, firstly, he didn't know it and, secondly, he didn't know

how to make use of it. And there were probably lots of people like Venka in the world. There were Venkas in America, France and England. Everywhere there were boys and girls who didn't think about anything and ones who thought about things you shouldn't think about—there was that sort too. Me and Kostya Malinin, for example. But now I knew the reason for that: it was because not all boys and girls knew how interesting it was to think, especially about the things you should think about. To think and to understand. Not instinctively, as they say, like an ant, but properly, like a human being.

I don't know how much longer me and Kostya would have sat there on the grass, thinking the same thoughts...

Kostya didn't say so, of course, but I would have bet my life on it, I could sense, I could hear, yes, really hear Kostya thinking word for word what I was thinking, only just as our meditations were at their most profound, something fluffy jumped off a tree onto my back and dug its claws through my shirt into my poor ant-bitten, sparrow-pecked body, so hard that I almost yelled out loud.

"Muska!" cried Kostya Malinin with delight.

And so it was, our Muska, the very Muska who had twice tried to eat me when I was a sparrow.

"Aha! Muska!" I cried, pulling her off my back. "I'll get even with you now!" I tried to grab her by the ear, but Kostya Malinin stopped me.

"Don't do that, Barankin!" said Kostya. "Forgive her, now that everything's turned out alright."

Kostya was obviously so glad that everything had turned out alright, splendidly in fact, that he grabbed me and hugged me with all his might. And I was so happy that I hugged the bench, the same bench on which we had sat THEN, after which I hugged the fence by the birch tree, then me and Kostya together hugged the birch tree, the same birch tree that stood by the bench on which I first had the idea that I was tired of being a human being.

"I've been looking for them all over the place, and here they are hugging a tree!" shouted Misha Yakovlev, speeding into the yard on his bicycle with Alik on the back.

They were followed by Zina Fokina, Era Kuzyakina and all the others.

"Misha!" me and Kostya cried out together, rushing up on either side of Yakovlev and hugging him too.

Misha was so taken aback that he let go of the handlebars and we

all fell down. Me and Kostya continued to hug Misha Yakovlev and Alik Novikov.

"What's the matter with you two? Have you gone up the creek? We only saw one another yesterday! Come off it! You're just like a pair of girls!" Alik and Misha tried to ward us off.

"Alik! Misha!" said Kostya Malinin with tears in his eyes, blubbering into Yakovlev's ear. "You'll never guess what happened here while you were away!"

"Happened? What happened?" asked Alik on the alert.

"It's all over now," I said, giving Kostya Malinin such a look that he bit his tongue.

Meanwhile the girls from our class had gathered round us.

"People have been looking for them all over the town," said Era Kuzyakina, "and here they are rolling about on the grass!"

"Barankin!" said Zina Fokina. "Are you or are you not going to do your maths?"

"Zina!" I said. "Dear Zina!" I repeated. "If you did but know how me and Kostya are going to do our maths!"

"And plant trees!" said Kostya, taking the spade from Era Kuzyakina's hands.

I took the spade from Zina Fokina.

"Barankin!" said Era. "Why do you and Kostya look so peculiar? And you're behaving in a very funny way too..." she added.

"Because we are!" I shouted.

"Well, let's go then," said Misha. "We've lost enough time as it is."

"Just a moment!" I said. "Listen, everyone! There's something I must tell you. The words HUMAN BEING SOUND REALLY GOOD!"

"Barankin!" said Era. "That's not right! Gorky wrote, 'How proud the word rings—MAN!'"

"Alright, Era!" I said. "We know what they sound like better than you now! Eh, Green Emperor? Malinin, I mean."

"We sure do, Barankin!"

So saying me and Kostya again embraced Misha from both sides in a great hug.

"Well, then," Kostya Malinin said solemnly to me and Misha. "Let's crawl off, eh?"

Whereupon he suddenly got down on all fours in front of everybody. It was a good thing I managed to grab him by the scruff of his neck.

"Crawl off where?" asked Misha. "And why crawl?"

"There they go again!" cried Era Kuzyakina. "Up to their tricks again!"

"Malinin!" I said menacingly. And followed this with a forbidding look, that told him to get all that rubbish out of his head double quick.

"I meant to say 'fly off!'" said Kostya, just about to flap an arm like a Green Emperor's wing. Fortunately I managed to grab his arm in time too.

Everyone began to look at us as if we were nuts. But what could I do? I couldn't explain to them, could I? So I pressed Kostya's hand as hard as I could and said significantly.

"Malinin!" I said. "Cheep in! Cheep out! I mean..."

"Breathe in! Breathe out!" said Kostya Malinin.

As usual the others didn't understand what we were going on about, but Malinin understood me. And I understood him. And we didn't say another word, because the three of us (me, Kostya and Misha) flew off to do our maths. That is, ran off, not flew off, but actually it was like flying off.

On a landing in our block of flats I suddenly bumped into Venka Smirnov. Remember him? He was the one who fired at us with his catapult when we were sparrows, wanted to pull our wings off when we were butterflies, and damaged our ant-hill when we were ants.

"Hi, there!" said Venka, narrowing his eyes and going down the steps two at a time.

I caught hold of his shirt and stopped him.

"What's the matter?" asked Venka.

"This is the matter," I said, pulling him closer and giving him a box on the ears.

"What's that for?" asked Venka, screwing up his eyes.

"For firing at me with your catapult!"

"When did I shoot at you with my catapult?"

"When I was sitting on that branch!" I pointed through the window at the poplar tree that Venka had nearly knocked me and Kostya off with his catapult.

"When were you sitting on that branch? What's all this nonsense about, Barankin?"

"It's not nonsense, you twi-twit. Remember the two sparrows on the poplar tree?"

Venka thought hard how best to answer my question.

"And this is for the butterflies! Next time don't pull our, I mean their, wings off! And this is for the ants, so you don't stick a spade in an ant-hill again..."

I boxed Venka's ears a couple more times, pulled the catapult with the telescopic sight out of his pocket, broke it in half and ran off to catch up Misha and Kostya.

"Barankin!" Venka's voice reached me faintly from below.

"What is it?"

"I didn't understand a word you were saying!"

"Never mind. You'll understand everything when you're a human being!" I bent down and shouted through the railing.

Event No. 36

I WANT TO BE A MAN!

That day we must have spent about four hours without a break doing maths with Yakovlev. At one point when we were going really hard at it Misha asked us: "Aren't you tired? Perhaps you'd like a rest?" "Oh, no!" me and Kostya cried in unison. "Of course we're not tired! Who wants a rest? Don't try and get out of it, Yakovlev!" "I'm not," said the dumbfounded Misha and began to explain the next problem to us, then he went back over everything we had done, then explained another problem, then set me and Kostya a small test, then laid his head on the table and said in a hoarse whisper that he couldn't do any more with us, because he had lost his voice and was worn out.

Then we picked up the spades and went with Misha to plant trees in the school yard. Physical exertion is the best form of relaxation after intensive mental exertion.

When we ran out into the yard we caught sight of Alik. He had been sitting on a bench all this time watching to make sure we didn't run away. Silly ass! On learning that we were going to work in the school yard of our own free will, he gawped in amazement and ran along behind us, clicking his camera as he went. We didn't have to plant anything, because all the trees had been planted already. So we set about watering them, with Alik still goggling disbelievingly and clicking his camera. Then we went back to my place again and did some more maths, until Misha and Kostya were ready to drop.

When Yakovlev and Malinin had gone home I went on sitting over my books until I fell asleep at my desk. How I got to bed, I don't remember. Probably my father carried me there. Next morning, however, I woke up on my own, so early that everyone else was still asleep. I made my bed very neatly myself, quietly had breakfast, packed my satchel, tiptoed out of the house and ran off to school. Today I must be, I simply had to be the very first to get to school.

And so I was. I arrived at school when all my classmates were still fast asleep in bed, Zina Fokina, Misha Yakovlev, Alik Novikov and Kostya Malinin—he was probably sleeping like a log. I was the only one in our class who was awake. Not only awake, but already in school about two hours before the lessons were due to start. Probably no other pupil had ever got to school so early, I thought. So you can imagine my surprise when I saw a figure creeping up to the main entrance along the opposite path behind some bushes. I stopped. The figure stopped too. I took three steps towards the school, and the figure took three steps as well. I began to creep towards the main entrance, and so did the figure. I popped my head out from behind the bushes, and the figure did the same. For a long time we stared at each other in silence, but then I got tired of keeping quiet.

"Malinin!" I said.

"What?"

"Why on earth have you come to school so early?"

"Why have you?"

"I just have... What about you?"

"I just have too..."

"I see!" we both said together.

Quietly, trying not to make a noise, Kostya and I crept up the stone steps, pressed our faces against the cold glass of the front door, still wet with dew, and waited to be let into *Our School*.

We stood in silence, not looking at each other, just stood and waited, never suspecting that in exactly two hours' time some most remarkable events would take place, events that would astound not only our class, but the whole school.

Firstly, in exactly two hours and ten minutes Nina Nikolayevna would call me to the blackboard and I would tell her everything I knew about butterflies. And Nina Nikolayevna would say to me: "You know butterflies very well, Barankin. Sit down! Well done! While you were answering, I even thought you had grown a pair of wings!" At these



words the whole class would burst out laughing, and only me and Kostya would sit at our desks with very serious expressions and not laugh at all.

Secondly, in two days from now me and Kostya Malinin would get fours for geometry instead of twos.

Thirdly, three days from now Zina Fokina would announce to one and all that in her opinion me and Kostya had contracted some strange disease and that we would probably get over it soon.

Fourthly, a few days after that Zina Fokina would suddenly stop telling me all the time: "Be a man, Barankin!"

Fifthly, in a fortnight or so my father would take a look at my marks book, as usual, and for the first time in his life say nothing to me but just shrug his shoulders in amazement and silently exchange glances with my mother.

Sixthly, in exactly a month's time the headmaster of our school, Vassily Vassilievich Turkin...

But perhaps it's a bit too soon to start talking about that, after all that would be in a month's time, and now it was only ten minutes, a mere ten minutes, that me and Kostya had been standing by the main entrance, just standing and waiting for someone to open the door and let us into *Our School*.



Story Two

THE SUPER-ADVENTURES OF A SUPER-COSMONAUT



Twenty Memoirs by Yuri Barankin
About Himself

A MANUSCRIPT FOUND IN A SCHOOL SACHEL IN LIEU OF AN INTRODUCTION

It was spring. I had just finished work on a novel for adults, and I was feeling on top of the world. I put on my coat and went outside. In March there are days when spring gets the upper hand and days when winter launches a counterattack with sudden snowstorms, but on this particular day winter had retreated into the shade of the fences and buildings and was hiding among the trees in Timiryazev Park.

I set off for the Park, humming under my breath and, stopping by a snowdrift that was gradually subsiding in the sun, began to think about what I should write next. I did not think about it for long, because my attention was distracted by the snowdrift, or rather, not the snowdrift itself but what was sticking out of it, namely, something that looked very much like a school satchel. And you must admit that you don't often see school satchels sticking out of snowdrifts, especially not very old satchels, or rather, not at all old ones.

I went closer, brushed off the snow and, taking hold of the handle, pulled the satchel out of the snowdrift and shook it like a bottle, as if I were expecting something to gurgle inside it. The contents of the satchel



kept quiet, but I could tell from the weight that there was something in it. "Perhaps," I thought, remembering the old proverb "Opportunity is rare, but rich", "perhaps this is the rich opportunity that so rarely comes a writer's way."

Sitting down on a bench, I took a long time to open the rusty lock. Eventually I succeeded, looked inside and saw a whole batch of school exercise books that I at once pulled out. At first I thought they were just ordinary exercise books for Russian, algebra and geometry, thrown away in the snow together with a satchel that had served its purpose, but leafing through the pages I whistled in amazement. All the exercise books were full of writing in a strange language I had never seen before, although the letters were Russian ones. The lines were blurred from lying under the snow for so long and some of the letters had lost their shape and were hard to make out. Judging from the numbering of the pages a lot had been torn out or lost.

The first page looked like this: skiddngiloh dkiswoofjgh noep kgjo wlwoppidng land ti tlig nors ut qaa sorubg. U gad juwc gomodjrf eptk pmod mpbir gprrt sfiiyd, sfm zyesd gehrriomh pm yp ig yhr eotlf. I out pnogu body snf rmy ou Om bstvj yjrtr str fsud ejrm d tomh hryd ykr irt kdmf smf dsud yjerm eomyrt bsimvjrd a vpimyrt-sttsbj royj doffrm dmpedyptyd myi pm yjod dtyovibdt fsu romyrt jsf trytrdyrf omyp yjr ejp; r gdshe of the feph yjr grmvrd dms niolfinrs ejredf ofiinh womhe snodee gkj ndko w nok dds gyoudmehl and gligneli gnelsid oulemm spelltingh qifuigjekoo sli ngppvdn ktiwodd ghio dhigl.

The mere sight of this page made me catch my breath, like an archaeologist who has just discovered Egyptian wall inscriptions, or cuneiform, or the mysterious writing of the Mayan tribes. What lies behind all that people now knew, because it had been deciphered, but what lay behind this strange jumble not even of words, but of letters? What on earth, for example, could these weird scrawls mean: skiddngiloh dkiswoofjgh noep?

The mysterious combination "skiddngiloh" fired my imagination. "SKID! DNG! ILOH!" I chanted, carefully returning the exercise books to the satchel, and closing the rusty fastening with difficulty. "I'll go back home now, then sit down and decipher the books," I thought carelessly, "and ... and what?" That was the point. What would I find out? I did not know what I would find out. I walked along, thinking that it must have been some boy or other, a boy, of course, not a girl. A girl wouldn't think of writing ten or whatever it was exercise books in secret code. So some

boy must have done it. What was he writing about? His first secret ambition? His first girlfriend? His first something. I didn't know what, but of course, it was a first something, and probably something important and, of course, secret. Perhaps it was a diary that would reveal a very interesting and unusual person to me when I decoded it. So it was with these thoughts that I went up to my flat...

My hopes of sorting out these mysterious "DNGs" and "ILOHs" vanished in about half an hour's time. The mirror that I put in front of the exercise books was no use either. I had thought that the text might be written like Leonardo da Vinci's diaries—he wrote down all his thoughts so that you could only read them reflected in a mirror. Perhaps the author of these mysterious notebooks had added letters, or even groups of letters to the syllables of familiar words to distort their meaning, but this was no help either. The next day, after a night of fruitless labours, I got all my friends and acquaintances to help decode the exercise books by showing them extracts copied out by me, but, alas, the exercise books remained silent, and no one got anywhere near cracking the code.

"It's all a practical joke," said one of my friends. "That composer Suyeslovsky is having you on. He's deliberately written that meaningless jumble of letters and put it somewhere you would find it, and here you are racking your brains over it."

But he was wrong. The letters did mean something. They were alive and breathing. I could feel, sense, that something lay behind them. Help came unexpectedly: one of my friends showed the coded text to a retired colonel who had been a cypher clerk in the Second World War, and he found the answer to the "crossword", as he put it, although not immediately. The very simplicity of the code made it so difficult to break.

"He's a bright lad," the colonel said to me on the telephone. "Good for him! I've never come across such a simple and baffling code before in all my life. It's like the Leonardo da Vinci school."

The telephone conversation left me with the key to the code in my hands. It really was extraordinarily simple: you just had to take the alphabet and write out all the letters from A to Z in a column, then write out the alphabet again, but this time back to front, beginning with Z and ending with A. All the letters of the first column were replaced by those opposite them in the second column. Instead of A there was Z, instead of B the letter Y, and so on. After writing out the two columns of letters on a piece of paper, I got the mysterious pile of exercise books out of my desk and began to decode them...

Several months passed, as they say in books. And when the last word had been deciphered, what lay before me on my desk was ... what do you think? Diaries? No, not diaries! Descriptions of a first romance? No. What lay before me were memoirs. Yes, memoirs! And not of some old-age pensioner or elderly person, or even adult. They were the memoirs of a boy, Yuri Ivanov. Memoirs about himself and written by himself. No, my instinct had not deceived me. The manuscript discovered in the school satchel had turned out to be very interesting material indeed.

Apart from the decoding I had to do quite a bit of work on it, of course, to knock it into shape, as they say, but that was all. I did not add anything to what the author had written. Where pages had been torn out or whole passages of the text completely deleted, I did not fill them in or invent anything for the author. I would say that, judging by what he remembers about himself and thinks about his future, Yuri Ivanov is a very interesting character.

Incidentally, I wondered for a long time what to call this story and was extremely sorry that the film "Memoirs of the Future" had already appeared. Sorry because everything described in Yuri Ivanov's exercise books should be called "Memoirs of Yuri Ivanov's Future." "The Super-Adventures of a Super-Cosmonaut" would also be quite good, because "super" is the favourite epithet of the writer of these coded exercise books.

So, I shall now conclude my speech and make way for Yuri Ivanov and his story, which may confidently be called "The Super-Adventures of a Super-Cosmonaut".

Part one

THE SUPER-ADVENTURES OF A SUPER-COSMONAUT

Memoir One

MEMOIRS ABOUT MEMOIRS

Always, in all times there will be a person who is entrusted with the most difficult task of all, and I, as you will see, shall be one of the first of these people! (Quotation from a speech delivered by me somewhere, some time, to someone, about something.)

Dear comrades of posterity and, of course, the present day! Firstly, I must explain to you why I, the world's first Worgravy, Coconin and

Super-X, have decided to write my memoirs. The fact is that I have read lots of books about the lives of famous people. For example, the whole series of books entitled *Lives of Famous People*. Apart from these, I have also read sextillions of other memoirs. Most of all I like the book about Alexander Alexandrovich Lyubishchev. It is all about his life, and his life has a lot in common with mine. He was against everyone else too. He used to launch attacks, like me. So we both have something to remember, him and me... Only please do not misunderstand me. I am writing memoirs about myself, Yuri Ivanov, not out of vanity or anything like that. I am writing to make it easier for historians who will want to collect material about my life: where I went, what I said: will all those who knew Yuri Ivanov kindly inform the Central Archives of the Worgravy-Coconin-I Board of anything they know concerning the life of the famous Worgravy well-known Coconin and one and only Super-X.

I got the idea of writing my memoirs very simply. The fact is that I don't like fiction at all, I only like textbooks, scientific literature and all sorts of memoirs or "reminiscences", as grown-ups say. Apart from books on space, I like reading the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia. I know it by heart. In fact I have a remarkable, perhaps even unique, memory. I need only read a page once to remember it for the rest of my life. I conceal it from everyone, although now and then I put on an act that goes something like this just to baffle everybody. Maslov, say, comes up to me and greets me:

"Hey, Long-Face (that's his nickname for me). Tell me who Rylke was"

"Which Rylke?" I begin to act the fool. "The one in the ninth form?"

"No, the one in the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia," Maslov corrects me.

"Oh, the Encyclopaedia. You should have said so. Now, Rylke..." I pretend to be trying to remember. "Rylke was a Russian geodesist and astronomer, Stanislav Danilovich, born 1843, died 1899. A major-general. Known for his works on earth refraction and levelling. In 1898 he advanced an original theory of earth refraction that took into account the disturbing and warming action of soil."

When I have finished they all gape at me, of course, and someone asks in an awe-stricken whisper:

"What about the 'all or nothing' law?"

I answer:

"The 'all or nothing' law in physiology is based on the incorrect assumption that in response to the action of an irritant excited tissue (nerve and muscular) either fails to respond if the extent of the irritation is not sufficient (below the threshold) or responds with a maximum

reaction, if the irritation reaches the threshold magnitude; with any further increase in the force of the irritation neither the magnitude of the response nor the length of its duration are said to change..." I went on and on.

The explanation in the Encyclopaedia is rather long, so I decided to give it to them in full, but Kashin blocked his ears up and howled: "Don't worry about the 'all'!! The 'nothing' is quite enough for me!"

But I have digressed. What was I remembering? Oh, yes, I was remembering that I liked great people's memoirs. But I've noticed one strange thing about them: in these memoirs more often than not it is not the great people who write about themselves, but other people who have known them or heard about them; the great people themselves sometimes write, but usually only when they are old. Actually I am convinced that people like me should be written about as early on as possible (preferably from the day they are born). And not only written about, but also photographed frequently, and the memoirs, I repeat, in fact I absolutely insist, should be written by the subject of the memoirs himself. If you were to ask someone else, my class-mates, for example, what would they write about me for History? Do you know how many enemies I have? I've counted them: one hundred and seventeen, no, one hundred and sixteen. Mother's a friend, but father's an enemy.

To cut things short, everyone who knows me, hates me, I repeat, except my mother. Just try asking my enemies, including my father! And anyway I wouldn't allow just anybody to write memoirs about me, not even my father. Take our class, for example, and all the pupils in it. If you asked them to write about me, I'm sure their memoirs would begin something like this:

"We'd rather not remember that good-for-nothing Ivanov at all, but if History requires it, we will. Well, first of all, **what did he look like?**"

This elicits the following responses:

"**The back of a bus...**"

"He used to pull such awful faces, you couldn't really tell!"

By the way, on that historic day when I decided to write my own memoirs, I was sitting in an empty class-room thinking: would I ever live to see the day when people judge other people not by what they do, but by the motives behind their actions, because if anyone were to judge me just by what I did, without thinking about the motives that made me act like this, it would probably produce quite a different impression. Judge for yourselves. At the beginning of the school year Alla Astakhova, our class prefect, got ill. Another pupil from our class with a double-



barreled name was made prefect in her place until she came back. It was a boy by the name of Kirillov-Shamshurin. He'd always been terribly keen to be prefect, but for some reason he had never been made it. But then Alla got ill, so naturally he was chosen to take her place temporarily. Under Alla Astakhova our class had been quite okay. But when Kirillov-Shamshurin took her place, he must have decided to turn the class into a model of perfection. Under Alla the kids had talked quietly in lessons and even written notes to one another. But Kirillov-Shamshurin decided that they mustn't talk or write notes. So one day he came up to me and said:

"Listen, Ivanov, you can do anything... Tell me how to stop the kids talking and writing notes in lessons."

Without even thinking, I said that was very easy.

"Well, show me then," begged Kirillov-Shamshurin.

"Get the kids to learn the Morse code. Then if anyone needs to communicate with anyone else during a lesson, they can just blink it to them in Morse. Absolutely soundless and easy as pie."

"You're a genius!" said Kirillov-Shamshurin and went off to pass on my idea to the kids, pretending that he had thought of it himself, incidentally.

I didn't realise that I was giving Kirillov-Shamshurin bad advice. How could I have known that the kids would use this for their own interests in the most incredible way?

Soon a deathly silence began to reign in lessons, more deathly than there had ever been under Alla Astakhova. But you should have seen the conversations that began! Everyone signalled in Morse to everyone else anything that came into his or her head. In the end they began to signal the right answers to one another. The marks shot up, with everyone getting "good" or "very good". Kirillov-Shamshurin was the hero of the day. If it hadn't been for our biology teacher Anna Petrovna, I don't know what would have happened. But Anna Petrovna turned out to have been a wireless operator at the front during the war, and she very quickly realised what was going on. And very quickly exposed the whole thing. Kirillov-Shamshurin got a good ticking-off, of course, and was asked, of course, how on earth he had thought of it? At that point, of course, he put all the blame on me. Three days ago there was a great uproar in the school about it. I was called to the headmaster, and all the details were written down ... in my marks book.

I had always wondered why people have double-barreled names? I don't know about the rest, but in the case of Kirillov-Shamshurin it was

probably because he had two people inside him: Kirillov and Shamshurin.

Actually, comrades of posterity, I would not have wasted a second of my valuable time on such a story, particularly on the bit about the marks book, but I did go up to Kirillov-Shamshurin and say:

"Now, own up, Kirillov-Shamshurin. Which of you ratted on me? Kirillov or Shamshurin?"

And I also sent him greetings from the snake.

He was very surprised and asked:

"What snake?"

"Allow me to tell you," I replied. "At a meat market in a certain Burmese town, that stands on one of the tributaries of the Irawadi delta, some hunters brought a very rare python more than five metres long that they had caught in the jungle. One of the townsmen felt sorry for the splendid snake about to be sold for meat, paid the required sum and went to the edge of the town to set the snake free. But no sooner had he taken the lid off the basket, than the lord of the jungle wound its powerful coils round the neck and shoulders of the unfortunate nature-lover. The passers-by only just managed to save him. Know why you're like the snake?" I asked Kirillov-Shamshurin.

Instead of answering, he sped along the corridor and raced downstairs. I wandered back into the class-room and sat down at my desk.

In fact I had thought up this trick of communicating one's thoughts at a distance by using the Morse code for myself, or rather, for interplanetary expeditions. I reasoned that during conversations with beings from other planets, if I needed to say something to my mates without being noticed, I would communicate with them by blinking. You couldn't say everything to beings from other planets. And they might not all be friendly. There might be some Kirillov-Shamshurins among them. So you see what happened, comrades in posterity: I had the best of all possible intentions in advising Kirillov-Shamshurin, but what actually took place was quite different from the motive behind it.

And yesterday I upset the music lesson. First I tried to skip it several times, but when that didn't work, I interrupted it so the teacher wouldn't make me waste my time any more. Why on earth, for heavens sake, should I spend my time learning something I'm never going to do? People will sing of me, but sing I never will... That's point one! And, secondly, I might get picked up by the police for selling flowers, that is, I don't sell them myself, but I help an old woman to sell them for a small fee. My training programme under the code name Worgravy-Coconin-Super-X

involves considerable clandestine expenses, and I spend all the pocket money from my parents on it. If I were to ask them for some extra money, they would start questioning me on why I needed it. "What's it for? And anyway money is the root of all evil. We give you quite enough as it is!" So I was forced to earn the money myself. But I could not tell the police about the motives that makes me sell flowers, when I could be doing something useful. (As if I could possibly do something that wasn't useful...).

So, I was sitting and thinking about the music lesson I had interrupted and about my flower-selling, when a noise broke out in the next classroom and some familiar voices continued what was obviously a conversation started earlier. Could they be talking about me? I listened and realised at once that they were talking about me. And about what had happened to me recently!

Memoir Two

WHAT EXACTLY IS COCONIN-1

I was interested to hear what had happened to me recently. So I crept up to the wall dividing the two class-rooms. They argued for a long time, but all the arguments could be divided into four versions. Boris Kuttyrev—we have someone of that name in our class, a fellow who's keen on satire and wants to be a writer, a Gogol or Saltykov-Shchedrin—so this Gogol-Mogul announced that, in his opinion, I had got into bad company. Kuttyrev is always imagining bad company everywhere. After much humming and hawing Vera Danilova said that, in her opinion, I had fallen in love and that was why I was getting up to the sort of tricks that people in love get up to. Lev Kirinsky (who's keen on the natural sciences) declared that I must have been stung by some fly or other, and that he would endeavour to find out precisely what. And Maslov, our budding cosmonaut, yes, cos-mo-ha-ha-naut, said that I was suffering from some kind of abnormality. So how could I trust my fellow earthmen, if I might use the term, to write reminiscences about me.

Maslov evidently wanted to explain in more detail why he thought I was abnormal, but he was cut short by Kolesnikov (the one who is keen on anthologies about weird and wonderful happenings). Kolesnikov cut him short and said:

"You just take my breath away with your puerile lectures: that Ivanov's got into bad company, fallen in love, been stung by a fly or is suffering

from an abnormality. It's all a load of nonsense. In fact the whole business is much more serious than you realise."

"Oh, Kolesnikov, witness of days gone by," said Alla Astakhova, our prefect. Alla's keen on newspapers, which is why she likes talking in headlines. "Tell us straight in words of one syllable and don't beat about the bush."

"Fine. If that's what you want. I'll tell you straight: Yuri Ivanov is not Yuri Ivanov at all, that is, not the Yuri Ivanov we think he is."

An incredible din broke out behind the wall, and I couldn't make out a single word. Then it went quiet again, and Kolesnikov continued:

"I think someone has substituted a different Ivanov for our Yuri Ivanov."

"Who could have done that?" several voices asked.

"Who could have done that?" Kolesnikov addressed the question to himself. "The only people who could substitute another Ivanov are beings from another planet. I am convinced that one dark night they flew down to earth in an unidentified flying object, landed, kidnapped Yuri Ivanov, and left us his double in his place. So there's nothing at all surprising about..."

Another terrible din broke out behind the wall, until the voice of Sergei Zharikov cut it short. He's keen on physics and maths and the most rational member of the class. Zharikov said:

"Come off it, everyone. You've thought up the most far-fetched explanations: from being stung by a fly to landing in an unidentified flying object!"

"Yes, he's from another planet! That's it!" cried Kolesnikov. "And he landed in a flying saucer!"

"From another planet!" Zharikov imitated Kolesnikov. "The author of a book published recently in the United States proves mathematically that no unidentified flying objects have ever appeared near earth, one, and, two, Yuri Ivanov is not the sort of person who could be kidnapped in a flying saucer. Even if a whole flying dinner service landed on earth, it wouldn't be able to get the better of Yuri Ivanov."

"Then what has happened?" asked Alla Astakhova. "What will happen at the next station?"

"At the next station?" Zharikov replied. "You know, of course, that I am a Wunderkind. I must explain that a Wunderkind is a young person who is mentally three or four years ahead of other children of his age. So, listen. If I am a Wunderkind, what is Yuri Ivanov, who is thirty-three years ahead of me mentally! Tell me that! How does he



manage to be thirty-three years ahead of all of us? What is it? A trick? Phenomenal ability? Where and at the expense of what does he get the time to be ahead of us? I vow to you that I'll solve the mystery of where he gets the time."

"Alright, Zharikov," said Astakhova. "We've each got our own version. I suggest that everyone who has a version should check it, including you, Zharikov."

You just can't imagine, comrades of posterity, what those wretched Nonworgravys could remember about me. Read my memoirs and you will see. The day before yesterday I found a sheet of paper folded in four in my jacket pocket. When I unfolded it I saw that the whole sheet was covered with ... what do you think? The thing I hate most in the whole world... Yes, poetry. Po-et-ree! Po-et-ree-hee-hee! Just look what I discovered in my pocket:

*In days of yore, long, long ago
Knights did assemble for the fray
In coats of mail from top to toe.
But then "Stop!" one knight did say.*

*"I want to look men in the eye,
To gaze upon my chosen mate,
Unflinchingly upon my fate,
And boldly meet your stare, my foe!"*

*Then as you into battle ride
Your face, dear knight, you must not hide.
So with my hand above my head,
I'll raise my vizor high instead
And bare my face for all to see.
That is the start of bravery.*

*Since the days of feudal lords
Much time has now passed by.
We have no armour and no swords
But brave men still do say:
"I want to look men in the eye,
To gaze upon my chosen mate,
Unflinchingly upon my fate,
And boldly meet your stare, my foe!"*

*Then as you into battle ride
Your face, dear knight, you must not hide.
So with my hand above my head,
I'll raise my vizor high instead
And bare my face for all to see.
That is the start of bravery.*

Someone had sent a person whose intensive programme of self-training took up his whole day down to the last second, see my log-book,* someone had sent me a poem. And what's more, I was forced to read it, even to record for the first time in my life in my log-book. "12.30-12.35

*Unfortunately I did not find a log-book in the satchel! (Author's note)

read a poem. 12.35-12.40—wondered who could have sent it to me and why!" Yes, the poem was blatant provocation. Blatant provocation in rhyme. And it could be interpreted by you, my scions, quite wrongly, just how wrongly I will explain later. For the time being I will simply say the following: of course it would have been better if the Nonworgravys had not remembered me but it would be quite impossible not to remember me at all. After all, my early years as a child are completely undocumented; what I said at the age of three, what I thought, what I wanted—I can't remember. Neither father nor mother thought to make any records. And the result is that part of my life has remained in the paws of time. I once read that recording something is wrenching it out of the paws of time. Only do not think, comrades of the present and posterity, that I am proposing to write a kind of diary or something of the sort, like girls write or what they usually tell weak-willed people to keep.

I read a children's magazine not long ago. Wait a minute, why did I write such a stupid thing about myself? Read it? I didn't read it at all, I just flicked through it. And in the magazine a girl had written a letter asking how to stop being weak-willed. The magazine replied that this was a very serious problem. It had even worried Lev Tolstoy, who in his youth had also reproached himself in his diary for being weak-willed and looked for ways of strengthening his will. Then they gave her all sorts of advice, including keeping a diary. They said that it would help her to develop will-power and character. That a diary was a way of talking about yourself: do I live as I should, etc. And so on and so forth. I found the advice of these Nonworgravys whom I despise quite absurd, of course. I must tell you that I divide human beings into two groups—the Worgravys and the Nonworgravys. Those who come after me will, with my help, know what Worgravys and Nonworgravys are, but my contemporaries may not have time to acquaint themselves with the explanation of these terms, so I will explain now: a Nonworgravy is a person unworthy of gravity, and a Worgravy is a person worthy of gravity. Under Nonworgravys I include, firstly, all girls without exception, and some boys, not all of them, of course, but all poets and the like. I count them as Nonworgravys too, and the remaining very few I call Worgravys. In order that you should understand and share my unfavourable attitude towards girls, I shall insert in my memoirs a note by the World Nature Conservation Fund that appeared in Paris in connection with the activities of Christian Dior, that famous legislator of fashion. Here it is.

"The legislator of Paris fashion, Christian Dior, was recently publicly accused of doing serious harm to the animal world not only of France, but also of other countries. This accusation took the form of an open letter addressed to him by the board of the World Nature Conservation Fund. The appearance each year of more and more models of clothes made of fur, fur coats and jackets of natural leather has led to the indiscriminate trapping of several species of rare mammals in such large numbers that these species may soon become entirely extinct."

Just imagine, become entirely extinct! And that could happen very soon just because of girls, who, I know, are all fashion crazy. Actually I must take some of that back. Not all girls. For example, there's one called Anya Brunova in our class. She's keen on literature and wants to be a writer. She makes up tales and stories. One of her stories was even printed in some magazine or other. But most of all she likes writing fairy stories. At our school concerts she always recites something she has made up herself.

Actually she might be the person to write a novel about me in some new series like "The Super-Life of Super-Great Men"!

So what do you think? Is Anya Brunova from our class worthy of gravity or not? Although I don't like to admit it, I was the first to say loudly to myself "Yes, she is!"

As far as gravity is concerned, there's nothing to explain. Only a few people are worthy of gravity, and most of all it is we, Coconins, the first and so far only representative of whom is me, Yuri Ivanov. Now I must tell you what a Coconin is. They don't exist yet, but they will. They will be human beings, but able to fly up into the sky quite simply, without aeroplanes, just by flapping their arms, then dive into the sea and swim underwater like dolphins at seventy kilometres an hour, then leap onto the shore like flying fish and speed over the earth like cheetahs. Cheetahs... In a nutshell, they will have to take all that is best in nature: even underground they will have to burrow like moles.

*Attention! Attention!
Listen, you nations!
Man's the king of nature.
A Complete Collection
Of Natural Inventions,
COCONIN-I's the abbreviation!*

*If you can soar up like a bird
And fly above your land,
You must have a sonar orientation
Like a bat's echolocation.*

*Attention! Attention!
Listen, you nations!
Man's the king of nature.
A Complete Collection
Of Natural Inventions,
COCONIN-I's the abbreviation!*

Now let me tell you why I have put my memoirs in code. First of all, as they say, modesty is a virtue; secondly, although this could be the right moment to start writing my memoirs, it may still be a little too early to read them; and, thirdly, for security reasons. You will realise, I am sure, that every country would like to have a person like me. To quote myself: "Always, in all times, there will be a person who is the first to be entrusted with the most difficult task of all!"

So for reasons of secrecy, absolute secrecy, you might even say, I decided to put my memoirs into code. As I once said to myself: "There are test pilots who test planes, Comrade Ivanov, but you, Comrade Ivanov, are testing yourself like a plane. And that's something quite different."

Now a word about how I decided to preserve my memoirs for posterity. I decided to make a carbon copy of them. If there was only one copy it could easily get lost, burnt in a fire, or something like that. I spent a long time wondering whom I could trust with the carbon copy of my memoirs and eventually decided to give it to our school cleaning woman, Stepanida Vassilievna. So I am handing them over to her bit by bit.

Now the most important thing. How I am training to be a Coconin. And where I am keeping my coconisation material. As you can imagine, I dared not entrust it not only to Stepanida Vassilievna, but to anyone else in the world, and so I...

At this point five pages were torn out of the notebook, so how Yuri Ivanov trained by the Worgravy-Coconin-Super-X programme, what this training consisted of and where Yuri kept the records of it remain a secret to this very day.

Memoir Three

THE MEETING-POINT OF THE SCIENCES

"...Any sensitive person might have said it was an unlucky day. But we, Worgravys, don't believe in days being lucky or unlucky. It was simply a question of having to sweat a bit more, that was all. Use up a few more calories..." These were the thoughts of Yuri Ivanov, that is, me as I sat in the empty class-room staring at the piece of paper with a poem on it that I had been sent. I was trying to work out the meaning of the poem. What a life, I sighed. As if I hadn't got my hands full with having to put every second of my life, thoughts and actions into code, now I had to decipher some lines of verse. Never before would I have bothered to try and understand a poem, but the one that lay before me contained a kind of hint, as if the person who had written it knew something secret about me... "In days of yore, long, long ago..." that line didn't have anything special, but the words "knights did assemble for the fray, in coats of mail from top to toe..." was an obvious allusion to me. Knights did assemble for the fray, in coats of mail... I was in a coat of mail in a sense. And this bit later on was about me too: "But then 'Stop' one knight did say..." The bit about the chosen mate could be left out, that hadn't got anything to do with me, of course, but what about: "Gaze ... unflinchingly upon my fate, and boldly meet your stare, my foe! Then as you into battle ride, your face, dear knight, you must not hide! ...That is the start of bravery..." That is the start of bravery! Was I a coward then? Perhaps I could find out who had written the poem from the handwriting? I stared hard for the umpteenth time at the scrap of paper, but it told me nothing, I didn't think anyone in our class had handwriting like that. If I found out who'd had the nerve to think up this bit of provocation in verse, I didn't know what I'd do to them! No, actually I did know: I'd refuse to take them with me to carry out my super-difficult mission on Earth.

So I sat there in the empty class-room, puzzling over the mysterious poem. That was the main thing, but as well as trying to decipher the poem, I was also wondering how to solve my financial problems. The old woman whom I helped to sell flowers hadn't turned up at the Central Market for a whole week now. I hadn't got the time to go and see her where she lived, just outside Moscow on Ryazan Highway. What was I to do? That was the second thing. Thirdly, I was training my left hand by squeezing a tennis ball. And, fourthly, I was training my right foot by pressing down on a second tennis ball like a pedal.

Somewhere upstairs, probably in the school hall, was the sound of music which I detested. "Everything and everyone are doing their best to distract me from my main goal and ideal," I thought.

The whole school was preparing for some super-concert called "Physicists and poets all are wel!" While down below someone was preparing for much higher things. They would have done better to start thinking what each of them would do when I began the most difficult mission in the world in my Worgravy-Coconin-Super-X super-programme. "What are they going to do?" I wondered.

At that moment there was a sound of footsteps, voices and guitars outside in the corridor. The door shook and opened. In the illuminated parallelepiped of the doorway the figures of some boys and girls appeared.

"Not a soul. Let's rehearse here!" A familiar girl's voice sang these words to a guitar.

The light clicked on.

"Look, everyone! Old Down-in-the-Dumps is in here!" Kashin's voice rang out behind me. "The melancholy demon. The spirit of exile!"

I didn't even bother to look round, but just thought to myself: "They would turn up! Fine lot of poets they make!"

"What do you mean: not a soul? Ivanov's in here," said Boris Kutyrev.

"Ivanov's the same as not a soul," said Vera Danilova.

I couldn't keep quiet after that, of course.

"Poets say you should devote yourself to literature, poetry or art, because only they can make a person's life really interesting and worthwhile," I said with an ironical smile.

"And physicists say there is no greater power on earth than the exact sciences, on which, they would have us believe, the world rests," countered Lev Kirkinsky.

"And no one knows how long this dispute has been going on, or how much longer it will go on," said Vera Granina.

"But there is one science whose disciples can say: 'Argue as much as you like, but the truth as always lies somewhere in the middle'. And since there is only one science at the meeting-place of all the disciplines, that science must be the best of the lot. It's called ECONOMICS," said Nina Kisina. (I had never been able to make out before what she was keen on, but if she really believed what she had just said with such a wise expression on her face, it must be economics.)

At this point, of course, I had to make the kind of statement that nobody could contradict.



"Do you know there is a fish called the piranha?" I asked all and sundry. "Well, this little fish is the terror of the tropical rivers in South America. It has extremely sharp teeth. If these savage pirates attack any poor creature trying to swim across a river, a few minutes later all that is left of it is a skeleton gnawed clean. These small fish are more ferocious than sharks or crocodiles. So it's not surprising that the Indians have called one of the rivers where they are found the Death River. I'd throw the lot of you to the piranhas at low water!"

Silence followed. No one even tried to counter my statement, except for Kisina who squealed:

"You know what that sounds like, Ivanov? Not even spite, but sheer hatred..."

After Kisina's outburst I said nothing, but began to squeeze one tennis ball and press the other even more furiously in silence.

Although Vera Danilova (who's keen on the stage, by the way, and wants to be an actress) announced that I was not worth bothering about, no one took their eyes off me, especially after what I had said about throwing them to the fish. But they all stared at me in different ways. Some looked at me as if I had got into bad company, others as if I had fallen in love, and a third lot as if I really had been stung by some insect or other. Only quiet, frail Lena Marchenko, who's keen on teaching, by the way; I detest her more than all the other girls in the class because she's so pretty: when she grows up she'll probably decimate the animal world so she can wear smart fur coats. Anyway, she was the only one who wasn't staring at me. "But she should!" I thought to myself. "She should look at me so as not to forget me. Yes, so as not to forget me."

My thoughts were interrupted by Kashin.

"The cabbage did not turn its head! Nor feel a thing at all!" he declaimed. "He-e-ey, there, Ivanov!" he sang to some stupid tune on the guitar. "How about you bu-u-zzing off! We're going to rehear-earse here!"

"Siberian scientists," I said, "have discovered that during experiments living cells communicate with one another with the aid of electro-magnetic signals in a strange language..."

I like startling my class-mates with unusual pieces of information.

As usual in such cases, there was a hush. They exchanged glances, and Vera Danilova said:

"'Star doth speak to star...' A poet said that a long time ago... And in a strange language."

"Well, it's a good thing these cells talk so you can't hear them,"

added Kashin. "Just imagine, if they all started talking aloud, what a racket there would be."

"The thing I like about Ivanov here," said Victor Maslov, "is that you can always get some unexpected information from him."

"Hey, Crossword!" said Nina Kisina. "How about really scrambling. We're going to rehearse in here. For a number of reasons I would advise you not to stay."

Have you ever noticed how a tiger at the zoo looks at people? I have. It looks *through* them, as if the people were as transparent as glass. And that is precisely how I looked at Danilova, Kisina, and, of course, Marchenko. I always look at girls like that. Like a tiger.

At that point Kashin the budding actor came to Kisina's aid once more.

"He-e-ey there, Ivanov!" he sang again to some stupid tune on the guitar. "Why don't you bu-u-uzz off from here! People have got wo-o-ork to do!"

And Kashin waited for me to deign to get up and leave the room. They all waited. The whole drama group. Headed by Kutyrev, king of satire. They stood and waited. And I waited, too, for them to leave. I sat and waited. It's more comfortable to wait sitting down. Let them stand, if they wanted a test of character. They were testing their character. So I would test mine, too. And I'd got more character than everyone in the world put together, so now I shall have to explain exactly what character (peculiarities, features) is. Character is the sum total of a person's basic, most stable psychic qualities which manifest themselves in his actions and behaviour.

So that is why I decided to switch on the super-stability of the sum total of my psychic features, because they were the most total and stable in the world.

The first to give way was Maslov, who is keen on space, which is why his mind works better than the others.

"It's no good," said Maslov. "He won't give way. Let him stay here... Perhaps he'd like to take part in the concert."

"What has happened to my poor contemporaries," I thought to myself. "They are going to pieces. It's time I tightened up the screws." And this is what I said out loud.

"What use are you, comrades," I said, addressing no one and everyone at the same time. "Certain circles have never pinned great hopes on you. But from comrade Maslov here, kindly note, certain circles do expect a

thing or two. The stirring crowd scene, the odd mission, and so on," I hinted mysteriously, shaking my head reproachfully. "Tut-tut, Maslov! It looks as though certain circles are mistaken in their expectations of Comrade Maslov, quite mistaken..."

They all exchanged glances once again as if to say: "He's fallen in love! Got into bad company! I wonder what insect did sting Ivanov! Perhaps it's not the real Ivanov, but a being from another planet!"

I went on lecturing Maslov, but he was no longer paying attention, nor was anyone else.

"How can we rehearse about him when he's here?" asked Akimova. "We're doing a skit on Ivanov, aren't we?"

"So what?" said Kutyrev. "Let him sit and watch. He might even like to add something. After all, he must know himself better than we know him. Perhaps it really would be better to consult him, eh?"

I didn't twitch a muscle during this conversation, of course. I just kept quiet, but my head was buzzing with questions. "What's that? A skit on me, Ivanov? The drama group would never have dared do that before. I must have got a screw loose somewhere." It was a good thing that I was digging in my heels and had refused to leave the class-room. Never mind. They would soon see whether I would let them do this skit or not.

While I was deciding not to ... not to let them do any libellous lampoons on me, Kutyrev came up and said:

"We wanted to have you in one of the acts, Ivanov, you see... We've got one that's called *Who Dreams What?* And in one of the scenes we just wanted to ... well, imitate you, or kind of parody you, see? As you probably know, the imitator doesn't just use a person's external features. He tries to get right down inside him. So we'd like to ask your advice, see..."

"Well, now, Kutyrev," I said slowly. "You were right, of course, to decide to ask my advice. One might even say that it was quite intelligent of you. But before giving it, I must know exactly what you are proposing to do, an imitation or a parody? More precisely, do you want to imitate or parody me?"

"Well actually, Ivanov," said Kutyrev, somewhat embarrassedly. "I don't think it will make a great difference to you what we do—imitate you or parody you."

"Now that's where you're wrong, Kutyrev. It makes a great difference to me what you are proposing to do—imitate me or parody me. Because

since you appear to be lumping together the concepts "imitate" and "parody", I feel obliged to explain that an imitation... You were right in saying that the imitator does not only take the person's external features, but tries to get right down inside him. But a parody is a distorted portrayal of something, malicious or good-natured mimicry. Can you see the difference, Kutyrev?"

"Yes, I can..."

"Excellent... Even if you don't understand parody, but can see the difference, that's something. I will permit you to imitate me, but not to parody me, and certainly not to mimic me." "They're just amateurs, don't know what they're doing," I added as an aside.

"Actually, Ivanov," Kutyrev paused. "As you know, in science more and more discoveries are being made at the meeting-point of say, mathematics and physics or chemistry and biology... So perhaps the same thing will happen with us ... at the..." Kutyrev broke off.

"At the what?" I asked.

"At the meeting-point," he explained.

"At what meeting-point?" I asked.

"Well ... of imitation and parody..."

"I see," I said. "Well, have a try ... at the meeting-point... Only remember there are meeting-points for which you may find yourself at mugging point!"

"You are just the sort of person who might give a mugging without any meeting-point at all, Ivanov," said Kutyrev, wiping his forehead thoughtfully.

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," I said. "Because someone who is going some day to..." I said significantly, "has the right now to..." And here I paused significantly.

Kutyrev exchanged glances with the others, as if trying to understand the meaning of the phrase "someone who is going some day to ... has the right now to..." Although my incomplete sentence was actually quite simple. It meant that someone who is going some day to get things more difficult than anyone else, has the right to have them a bit easier now.

Walking off a few paces, Kutyrev began to confer quietly with the others, while I...

I settled down more comfortably on my chair and, as usual, began to do five things at the same time: 1) sit patiently waiting for the satire on me; 2) squeeze a tennis ball in my pocket with my right hand to strengthen the muscles in my palm; 3) meditate upon my financial problems;



4) press a tennis ball on the floor with my left foot; and 5) rack my brains as to who had given me that wretched poem.

Of all these five occupations the financial problem worried me most of all. Without realising it, my mother took responsibility for all the non-secret expenditure on my training for my super-difficult super-mission. Firstly, a Super-X must know the map of the heavens like the back of his hand. (My mother bought me tickets for all the lectures at the Planetarium.) A Super-X must be both a physicist and geodesist. (My mother had bought me a whole shelf of books on physics and geodesy.) And a Super-X must be able to use a cine-camera. (My mother had bought me a Ladoga cine-camera.)

But there was also the secret expenditure. And what expenditure! The heat chamber at the Sandunovsky Baths cost me thirty copecks a time, the centrifuge at the fair in Izmailovsky Park was thirty copecks a go, and the Death Whip planes in Gorky Park were also thirty copecks. And so it went on each day. First one, then the other, then the third! And on Sundays it was all three together! And several times too. It was a good thing I had set up a Savings Fund two years ago with money intended for school lunches, cinema tickets, ice-cream and so on. These savings would last me for another month or two. But what then? Perhaps I could get some work? Actually as well as the five things that I was doing sitting on the chair, there was also a sixth: I was listening, not very attentively, it is true, but I was listening to the conversations of my class-mates, who had begun their rehearsal.

Memoir Four

ACTION EQUALS COUNTER-ACTION

"Well, well," I thought to myself. "It will be interesting to see what happens now?" And this is what did happen.

"Boys and girls," I heard. "We have a mysterious pupil in our class by the name of Yuri Ivanov. The mysterious thing about him is that his work is getting better and better. We, or rather, our teachers, haven't got good enough marks for him. One teacher not only gives him the top mark of five, but also sixes, sevens and eights, and once even gave him a ten. It's extraordinary, of course! But the other even more surprising thing is that the better Yuri Ivanov works and the more he knows, the worse he behaves. He is growing more and more aggressive! And if he

were to get a good hiding, I just dare not think what would happen. But we are not going to show you that, because recently Yuri Ivanov has been working so well that he has begun teaching the teachers. We invite you to watch a short sketch entitled: *What Yuri Ivanov Does and Perhaps Does Not Dream About*.

All this was uttered by Victor Smetanin, incidentally. He is keen on PE, so that is probably why he was chosen to say this about me. He's the strongest in our class, not counting me, of course.

"The cast is as follows," said Smetanin. "Yuri Ivanov is imitated by Maslov, and the teachers by the pupils of our class. Each person has who they are written on a placard."

What followed, dear comrades of posterity, I would actually rather prefer not to say. To my mind it was not particularly interesting.

The drama group led by Maslov showed me examining teachers and asking them questions. What is more, before I began asking them questions, I said they could make use of cribs, text-books, and magazines when they answered. They could also call up any professors they knew and ring the Academy of Sciences or any other academy in the world. The questions I asked were not all that clever or witty, as far as I could see. Firstly, I asked the teachers how fish sleep, with their eyes open or closed? Then I asked them whether they thought a water molecule was wet or dry. And the third, and most important question that I asked them was why there was so much room in a mushroom.

Maslov, who was acting me, asked this question in a voice so like mine that everyone standing up and sitting down at the desks burst out laughing, and not only burst out laughing, but almost split their sides. Although according to the script they were probably supposed to be doing something quite different. While they were laughing, Maslov-Ivanov took a step sideways and kept quiet with a fearsome expression on his face, just like I sometimes did. After "my" question as to why there was so much room in a mushroom, all the teachers created a kind of dumb scene. Teachers often created dumb scenes about me, like in the play *The Inspector-General*. On my behalf Maslov created the same sort of scene for the teachers. And it was so like me, that all the boys and girls leapt up and almost hoisted him on their shoulders.

"And now we present for your enjoyment a satirical sketch written by Boris Kutyrév and entitled *The Yuri Ivaslov Symposium*," said Victor Smetanin.

There were gales of laughter. "So that was the lampoon and now...

Now we're going to have a satire on me," I thought calmly.

"The cast is as follows," announced Smetanin. "Maslov is Ivaslov, Glebova is the history teacher, and the rest are just themselves. So imagine you are in our class-room during a history lesson..."

Smetanin for some reason gave another snort and walked off. I pricked up my ears. I didn't like it that the action was taking place as if in a dream and that Maslov was acting some Ivaslov or other. Could the poem have come from that intermedium...? The rehearsal began.

I looked around for Maslov, who was to play Ivaslov, but to my great surprise instead of Maslov-Ivaslov I saw myself standing up at the black-board. As if I had somehow managed to produce a double and was standing at the board and sitting at my desk at the same time.

In real life Maslov and I had nothing in common at all. What I mean is we did not bear the slightest resemblance to each other. I had very dark, almost black hair, and Maslov was fair, like a negative of me. In general we were quite different from each other. But there I was looking at Maslov, like my reflection in a mirror. At first I couldn't make out what had happened. Then I caught on. I realised that Maslov was copying me. He was always copying everyone in our class. Everyone except me, that is. Because people didn't play tricks on me. I wasn't a Shadrin! Or a Vassiliansky! Or an Orlov! Or a Brender! Maybe he copied me behind my back. But he was too scared to do it to my face. Just let him try! Although why "let him try", when he was trying already. Sitting there at a desk with my expression on his face. Sitting in the same pose as me. Even doing three things at the same time, like I did... Yes, three. Reading, that was one! Squeezing a tennis ball with his left hand. And jotting down something in his note-book with his right.

"Shame upon you, Ivanov," I reproached myself. "Letting those poets get out of hand. Here they are, imitating you, as Kutyrev put it, and you're just sitting and watching."

For the first time in my life, watching Maslov-Ivaslov, I saw how I stood at the board and how I looked at the teacher. A teacher once said at a staff meeting that whenever I came out in front of the class he or she felt quite terrified. Now I understood why they were afraid of calling me up to the board. But I couldn't help looking at them like that. Let them stop calling me up to the board at all, wasting my time like that.

"Well, my friends," I said, that is, not I, but Maslov who was imitating me, and giving the teachers such a look that it sent shivers down their spines.

Maslov-Ivaslov reacted to the second question so like me in complete silence that Glebova and all the others in the room burst into gales of laughter again, although according to the script they were supposed to be doing something else. At that point I put my right hand on my left wrist and began to take my pulse. My pulse was that of a real super-man and super-cosmonaut. It was steady and as regular as the time signals from the Sternberg Observatory. Fifty-two beats a minute. At the same time my brain analysed carefully everything that my eyes saw and my ears heard.

"Firstly, it isn't an imitation, as they promised," my brain told me. "It's a parody, and a pretty malicious one at that, and secondly, what about the question we asked the teachers? We could have asked them a question that only we, you and I, could answer, of course. But we would never have asked them such a stupid question as that... And they call this a meeting-point." My super-strong hands supported my super-informed brain. "I'll give them a meeting for a beating!"

In the meanwhile Maslov said:

"Wait a minute, everyone. I want to repeat the end of the sketch. I wasn't doing it quite right. I haven't quite got the feel of it."

"Just you wait, Maslov. You'll get the feel of it alright in a minute!" I thought.

Then I clenched my fists and said to myself: "Action equals counter-action." And, transforming mental energy into mechanical, I strode up to Maslov, that despicable buffoon, that most contemptible Nonworgravy of all Nonworgravys... To think that he actually belongs to a young cosmonauts' club!

Memoir Five

A STRONG PULSE BEAT

People usually judge a person by his actions, and not by the motives behind these actions, which is a very bad thing. And very wrong too. Judge for yourselves. In about thirty seconds from now I shall go up to Maslov and clout him. If one judges this action without considering the motives behind it, it is a wrong action. A real piece of hooliganism. And if this is a piece of hooliganism, and I am to be judged by it, then you can see what I am. If I am judged by the action, that is. But if you consider not the action itself, but the motives behind it,

you get a completely different view of things. Here in the class-room is the world's very first Coconin, Worgravy and Super-X. All day he has been training on the centrifuge and in the heat chamber, and in the evening he has also been studying at school. His muscles are aching, and his head too, from studying. Instead of having a rest, he is continuing his studies: working on several very serious problems at the same time—how to solve his financial difficulties, and so on. And developing the muscles of his left hand and right foot. And doing a space crossword.

During all this some contemptible poets led by Maslov rush into the class-room and start poking fun at him, using some stupid nicknames. Is that fair? No, it is not. And if it is not fair, is it right to punch Maslov in the gizzard? Yes, it is. I began to advance slowly and threateningly on the drama group saying:

"The effect of blows on bodies was actually studied by Leonardo da Vinci, but he did not possess the technology for observing rapid processes, of course. Both he and Isaac Newton, who lived two centuries later, studied the movement leading up to the blow and its result: the deformation or change in the body structure. But, naturally, they were unable to understand the spreading of the shock wave in the body and, of course, to measure it."

At this point I reached Maslov and with the words "knowledge is strength" I hit him good and hard so he would know how to mimic me next time. Meanwhile I continued to develop the theory of the blow:

"With time the need to measure this process became more and more pressing and turned into a problem: for a blow is both a constructive and a destructive force, and its capacity to destroy must be controlled."

I think it was more likely the destructive than the constructive power of my blows that made the girls run off squealing in all directions. Only one girl whom I think someone called Tanya Topoleva, if I'm not mistaken, stood her ground fearlessly. I thought the whole drama group would break up after the very first diffusion of my shock wave in their bodies, but Begunov, Lomakin, Kashin and Dudasov closed ranks like an ice-hockey team and sped like a man to Maslov's aid, uttering pitiful cries:

"Oh, you, Down-in-the-Dumps!"

"Crossword!"

"Spirit of exile!"

To which I replied:

"In a hard body shock waves spread just like sonic waves in a closed

room, reflecting, interfering with (i. e. overlapping), strengthening or weakening one another. The impact acceleration is different in the different parts of the body and can by no means always be predicted or calculated. For this reason it is important to measure it. And that is what scientists do at the Impact Parameter Measurement Laboratory of the Mendeleyev All-Union Metrological Research Institute in Leningrad."

It's better to do four things at once in peace and quiet than in a fight, of course. But even now I didn't waste any time: I delivered blows right and left (duck! dodge! feint! strike!), lectured them on how to measure the impact of a blow, did a crossword (a constellation in the southern hemisphere with eight letters?) and meditated on my financial difficulties (what was I to do about money?).

To be precise, there was a fifth point too. As well as the blows I was delivering, there were the blows I was receiving, or, as boxers say, letting through. One of these was a blow to my forehead. It was a brilliant blow. So strong and effective that the question of finding a surdo-chamber where I could train in peaceful isolation, suddenly solved itself: I CAN FIX UP A SURDOCHAMBER NEXT SUMMER IN THE COUNTRY! IN GRANDMA'S CELLAR! IN THE COUNTRY! I BET IT'S AS QUIET AS ANYTHING THERE! AND THERE'S PLENTY OF FOOD!

Yes, someone's landed a beauty on my forehead. I can't imagine which of these butter-fingers could have delivered such a well-placed blow, I thought, sending everyone scattering in all directions and driving Maslov and Dudasov into the geometrical figure formed by a corner of the class-room. "Well done, Ivanov! Good lad! Divide and rule, Ivanov!" Unfortunately I only managed to carry out half of my programme. At that very moment when I had divided all the drama group members and was getting ready to rule them, our form teacher walked into the room accompanied by the girls from our class. In accordance with the law of inertia (discovered by Galileo in 1632) I continued fighting for a bit longer, of course, and even got as far as the following paragraph:

"But the duration of the impact process is extremely short—from a hundredth of a millisecond to a few microseconds. Here metrologists are assisted by an oscillograph. Their oscillogram can be examined and photographed on a screen several days after the measurement is taken! But the oscillograph cannot take account of impact acceleration, the main parameter of the blow, because it comes after the instrument has recorded the blow. The oscillogram must be described mathematically,

the information being put on tape and fed into a computer. Only then can the job be considered complete."

"What's going on here? What do you think you are doing?" asked Zinaida Yefimovna loudly.

The number of useless questions people ask one another! I think this is because they are incapable of valuing and saving their own and other people's time. Take our form teacher, for example. She comes into the room and sees some kids scrapping. She actually sees them scrapping, but she still asks "What's going on in here?" What is going on? A fight, that's what! I could understand it if our chemistry teacher asked the same question. He's half-blind. That would justify him asking it. But Zinaida Yefimovna's sight is perfectly alright. It's a good thing that this is impossible in the super-cosmonaut sciences. There you have to ask highly precise questions. And give equally precise answers, without any superfluous words.

I managed to think all this while Zinaida Yefimovna was telling me in no uncertain terms what a dreadful impression my actions had made on her recently. So that's what you get when a person is judged by his actions alone. A dreadful impression. I was just about to advise Zinaida Yefimovna to judge me, on this occasion at least, not by my actions, but by the motives behind them, but I did not have time. For at this moment a thought flashed through my head that was far more important for my future super-cosmonaut flights. I remembered about my pulse.

Never mind. I'll manage somehow. I'm a Worgravy! I don't read you! Out!

Zinaida Yefimovna was still ticking me off, when this idea flashed through my fevered brain. All these conversations had made me forget what, according to my programme, I was supposed to do immediately after a fight. I put my right thumb on my left wrist and, choosing a moment when Zinaida Yefimovna stopped to take a breath, said:

"Would you mind keeping quiet for a moment, Zinaida Yefimovna?"

"What for?" Zinaida Yefimovna asked me very sternly.

"My pulse!" I said, looking at my wrist-watch and counting the beats.

"Aren't you feeling well?" asked Zinaida Yefimovna.

In reply to this question I shook my head vaguely, trying to keep count. Actually my pulse was pretty good. Beating strongly. And as regular as the time signals from the Sternberg Observatory. Everyone was silent, so I quickly multiplied the number of beats and got fifty-two beats per minute. What a heart I had! A splendid motor. Judge for yourselves:

fifty-two beats per minute before a fight and fifty-two after it. Someone, somewhere, sometime would be very pleased with a pulse like that...

"What's the matter?" asked Zinaida Yefimovna anxiously. "Are you really feeling ill?"

"Everything's fine!" I reported to her. "What were you going to say?" And I added to myself: "You are Earth! I am the Galaxy. I'm receiving you."

My state of health, just like my training, was of course a confidential matter, so I said to myself in a voice like the famous radio announcer Levitan's: "The super-cosmonaut Yuri Ivanov is feeling very well!" Then I added loudly, addressing Zinaida Yefimovna:

"Carry on, Zinaida Yefimovna! I'm all ears!"

I would never have thought that such a simple sentence as "Carry on, Zinaida Yefimovna! I'm all ears!" could produce such a strong reaction (hyper-reaction).

Angry exclamations were fired at me from all sides.

"Did you hear the way he talks to a teacher?"

"Ordering her around. Wait a minute! Keep quiet! Carry on!"

All the Nonworgravys were in a state of uproar. The whole drama group led by buffoon-in-chief Maslov. The only person who did not get angry was Zinaida Yefimovna herself. Probably because her reaction to these words was more complicated than that of the others. After my words she started to shake all over, as if she were on a vibro-bench, not the floor.

Before this conversation I had thought Zinaida Yefimovna was alright. She knew physics very well and could teach it well too, although she was very young. And she was interested in sport. And she went to the Planetarium. I had seen her there several times with her son. In fact she was a Worgravy! I didn't make up my mind about her at once, of course. First I studied her, but then I realised what she was like and gradually began to consider her as a Worgravy. Then I observed her for a much longer time and even decided that when passenger flights into space started, she would perhaps be one of the first people to go on them. But now I no longer think so. With a vibrating nervous system like that, she shouldn't be allowed on a mono-rail, to say nothing of outer space.

"Give me your marks-book, Ivanov..." said Zinaida Yefimovna. "Has your father returned from his business trip?"

I indicated silently by my facial expression that he had.

"This will be a nice present for him," said Zinaida Yefimovna. She returned the marks-book to me with a long entry in red ink.

I took it and very carefully without budging from the spot read what she had written. This is what it said: "Started a fight. Disturbed a drama group rehearsal. Behaved insolently and aggressively!" Signed: "Z. Tairova."

There you are! Zinaida Yefimovna was not judging my actions by the motives behind them... So everything was just right, as it was in her lessons.

"What are you going to do now, Ivanov?" Zinaida Yefimovna asked me. "Now and in general?"

"Now I want to go to sleep," I said.

"What do you mean—go to sleep?" exclaimed Zinaida Yefimovna.

"It's quite simple," I explained. "I'll just lie down on my desk and go to sleep. After a fight and a report like that in your marks-book nobody could go to sleep, but I will." So saying and without waiting for Zinaida Yefimovna's permission, I climbed onto my desk, relaxed according to my Coconin system and ... went to sleep.

They started yelling their heads off, each of them according to his or her "special subject". They probably thought the noise would stop me falling asleep.

"Obvious but incredible," said one of the girls.

"From the obvious to the incredible," I corrected her without opening my eyes.

"Time to search and be astounded!"

"Time to search and astound," I interrupted the conversation once again.

"Goodness knows what he has instead of nerves!" said Maslov.

I liked that. "That's what I had to prove!" I felt like saying, but kept quiet.

The last thing I heard was an argument about whether I had gone to sleep or not, and the voice of Sergei Kolesnikov.

"He's not a human being, he's a whole ATE!" he said, with what I thought was clearly admiration in his voice.

"What's an automatic telephone exchange got to do with it?" asked Vera Granina in surprise.

"I didn't mean that sort of ATE, I meant an anthology of total enigmas. Wherever Ivanov is, some sort of strange enigma is bound to appear. Fancy falling asleep after a fight, in full view of everybody! Including Zinaida Yefimovna!"

"Whether it's an ATE or not, I shall have to raise the question of Ivanov at the staff meeting," said Zinaida Yefimovna.

"Why at the staff meeting?" said Nikolai Botov in surprise. "With

him even a fight is interesting and useful. While you're fighting you can find out something useful from him. The number of times the teacher has explained the theory of impact to us and I haven't remembered it, but now I know it by heart." Then Botov seemed to burst into song, reciting by heart: "The impact of blows on bodies was actually studied by Leonardo da Vinci, but he did not possess the technology for observing rapid processes, of course. Both he and Isaac Newton..."

"He's drummed all that into your head!" Maslov explained. "So you can make use of the same method, my dear tenor."

After that I heard the voice of Vera Granina (who's keen on medicine) again.

"I'll just test whether he's asleep or not. Perhaps he's pretending." (I could feel her hand on my wrist.) "What a pulse... Very slow and steady, just like you get when you're asleep..."

That was the last thing I heard. When I woke up, Zinaida Yefimovna wasn't in the class-room anymore, and the rest of my class-mates were sitting and staring at me in silence. I got up and stretched. Then I opened my satchel, put my marks-book into it, got out my space cross-word, and filled in the constellation in the southern hemisphere. After that I jumped up from the desk and went out of the class-room accompanied by the total silence of my class-mates.

Memoir Six

EVERYTHING'S FINE, BUT WHERE'S YOUR SENSE OF HUMOUR?

In the corridor I was caught up by Boris Kutyrev (keen on satire) who grabbed me by the jacket (he always moves his hands when he is talking) and said:

"Listen, Ivanov. You know I don't like anything about you. But do you know what I dislike most of all?"

"What's that?" I asked, adding: "Give me a short, clear answer, please. You're standing next to Yuri Evgenievich Ivanov, not up at the board!"

"The thing about you that I dislike most of all is your megalomania. You're not so much serious, as morose. You don't have a sense of humour, see? Everything about you is desperately morose. Now you've just shown us how you could fall asleep. We all realise what the trick was, of course. You agreed with Granina beforehand that she would say you were asleep,

and she did. But it's all so miserable. If it were done with a joke and a laugh, it wouldn't make such a dreary impression."

Kutyrev paused for a moment and, seeing my face darken, said:

"There, you've got even more miserable, but 'he who laughs last, laughs best.'"

"Perhaps there is already someone in the world who will laugh after everyone else," I said, turning my back on Kutyrev and striding down the corridor.

I automatically thrust my hand into my side pocket, where I felt a sheet of paper, although I knew perfectly well that I hadn't put one there. I ran down the steps, went into the street and pulled the sheet out of my pocket. My heart was beating fast. Surely it couldn't be another one... I unfolded the paper quickly ... a poem! There was a poem written on it! It was then that I realised someone had decided to poison my existence with this rhyming rubbish. I got excited, while remaining perfectly composed, of course, and read the poem:

*Birds wing their way across the sky
Without machines to show the way.
Through cloud and mist and rain they fly
In depths of night or light of day.*

*No wind accompanies their flight,
No lights on earth them beckon...
So they must feel,
So they must feel something,
But what is it that they feel?*

*We, human beings, out at sea
Are saved by dolphins from the storm.
They bear us safely through the reefs
And land us on the harbour shore.*

*No wind accompanies their flight,
No lights on earth them beckon...
So they must feel,
So they must feel something,
But what is it that they feel?*

They had sent another poem to a person who was so busy with his self-training programme that every second of his day was taken up. And I was again forced to read a poem and make the following entry for the second time in my life in my log-book: "From 5.30 to 5.35 read a poem... From 5.35 to 5.45 wondered who could have sent it to me and why."

I began to compare the first poem with the second one. I had the impression that someone already knew something about me, or at least had guessed something. The first poem read: "Then as you into battle ride your face, dear knight, you must not hide." The second one said: "Birds wing their way across the sky," and note "without machines to show the way", they fly "through cloud and mist and rain", "in depths of night or light of day" and, most important, "no wind accompanies their flight", I stress: "no wind". That was a kind of hint, and also "no lights on earth them beckon". Then the bit about feeling: "So they must feel, so they must feel something, but what is it that they feel?" Someone seemed to be trying to get right under my skin and find out just what my feelings were and whether I had any feelings at all. And so, puzzling over this enigma in verse, I went home along the pavement, trying to walk along the line of the lunar terminator. (The line of separation between the light of the sun and the shade of the moon on earth.) It's not much fun walking along the earth terminator. The temperature of solar light and lunar shade is probably about the same. It is much more interesting to walk along the Mercury terminator. On the sunny side the temperature is plus five hundred, and in the shade it is minus two hundred. At this thought I stopped. Terminators are all very well, but someone was following me. They were probably after the secrets of my training programme. In our school not only Maslov, but also lots of other boys wanted to be cosmonauts. That was probably why I'd seen Samsonov on the merry-go-round one day with some girls. But he was just taking a ride. The next time he was alone. And kept looking at me suspiciously. At the Sandunovsky Baths last time Dudasov said: "Isn't that the fifth time you've been in the steam room?"

Never mind. Even if they did become cosmonauts, they would only be ordinary ones ... with stand-bys. But I would be a super-cosmonaut, I knew that for sure. I would be the leader. The top one in the world. The top one and the best trained for super-space super-flights of all cosmonauts all over the world. Thinking these thoughts, I turned a corner, jumped from the terminator into the shade and hid in the first doorway I came

to. The plan was a simple one: the unsuspecting spy would appear round the corner and thus betray his wretched identity. No sooner had I thought this, than who should appear round the corner than Sergei Kolesnikov. I recognised him at once by his long neck, even in the darkness. The anthologist of total enigmas, Kolesnikov, had a long neck, that swivelled like a giraffe's. When he was out of sight, I emerged from my hiding-place and hurried off home.

According to my strict schedule I have to be in bed each day by ten o'clock. Even if the television is showing a new rocket launching, I must be in bed. You have to make lots of sacrifices if you want to be a Super-Cosmonaut and a Perworgravy.

Memoir Seven

AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE MOST TOTAL ENIGMA

Our house is very near the school. So I shot like a bullet across the segment of the globe covered with asphalt and called the Garden Ring that separates my house from Vorovsky Street where the school is.

I was in a hurry because my schedule for that evening had got rather overloaded. I have already told you that no matter what happened I had to be in bed by ten o'clock each day. Before that I had to study some geodesy and astrophysics. And, most important, do my first bit of training on the terminator of the planet Mercury. I could have managed all this perfectly well, of course, if I hadn't had to show my marks-book to father. After he had read it, he was bound to give me a talking-to, which was not provided for in my schedule. Then mother would be sure to join in. She would begin defending me, and father would start arguing with her. All that could take up masses of precious time.

When I ran into the hall, neither mother nor father were at home. I followed my schedule by doing the following: first I poured a simple compound of hydrogen and oxygen into a metal measuring-glass, brought it to the boil, sprinkled six grammes of sinepsis into a china crucible and mixed the sinepsis with three spoonfuls of polyose. Then I took a thin slice containing elements of phosphorus and calcium and combined it with a thick strip of amino-acids and ... well, to cut it short, I had a glass of tea with sugar and a slice of bread and cheese! Then I put my marks-book on father's desk in his room, where he was bound to see it. I was about to return to my room, when I noticed a pile of newspapers on



the desk. Whenever he read newspapers, father underlined articles, sentences and sometimes just words. I looked to see what he had underlined this time: in *Izvestia* and *Komsomolskaya Pravda* it was mainly articles on bringing up adolescents. In yesterday's *Moscow Evening News* an item on a financial subject had been underlined (my father, dear comrades of posterity, is a financial auditor and often goes away from Moscow to carry out audits. Apart from that, he is always busy, because he is studying for a post-graduate degree. He also often audits me, because he thinks that I have become "impossible", a word for which he will have to answer, of course).

So, in the *Moscow Evening News* a financial article had been underlined and a photograph had been ringed in red ink with a large question mark.

Now wait a minute! The photograph showed me and my sambo trainer. And the question mark was there, because the face in the newspaper was mine, but the name under it was not. I attended the sambo classes under an assumed name, of course. What is more, I had been photographed

without my knowledge and consent. I hadn't paid any attention to the journalist. When could he have taken a picture of me? I read the caption under the photograph once more: "Merited Master of Sport Alexei Rogunov, the well-known sambo expert, is now trainer at a sambo club in a micro-district of Chertanovo. Alexei Rogunov has trained several fine sportsmen. He is photographed here with a group of beginners just before a training session. In the righthand is Kolya Gorlov, one of his most promising pupils." And below it said: "Photographs by V. Fyodorov."

Well, Comrade Fyodorov, if you and the other correspondents start photographing me in all the clubs I attend (for example, the gliding and parachute clubs and so on), under a different name each time, of course, and if these and other pictures start appearing frequently in the press I shall be forced to deliver an ultimatum to TASS: it's me or the photo-correspondents.

I've got quite enough problems as it is. Last Sunday I was walking along Gorky Street with father, when a boy from the parachuting club popped up and said: "Hi, Semyon Starovoitov! We're jumping off the roof tomorrow!" Then just walked on as cool as a cucumber. Father's glasses shot up onto his forehead at once, of course.

"Why did he call you Semyon? And your surname's not Starovoitov. What jumps was he talking about? What roof? And why from a roof?"

"What roof?" What this, what that! "That's what we call the tower! The parachute tower! It's slang, you know."

"But why did he call you Semyon Starovoitov?"

"He made a mistake. Mistook me for someone else. I must look like someone called Semyon Starovoitov."

Why did everything have to be turned into a tragedy? Couldn't it be made into an heroic epic at least? So that father would react to the boy's words like this, say:

"So it seems you're not only Yuri Ivanov, lad, but Semyon Starovoitov too!" Followed by a good-natured laugh. And I would give a wry grin and say: "Yes, father, I'm not only Yuri Ivanov. I'm Semyon Starovoitov, and Nikolai Gorlov, and Kostya Filimonov, and Sergei Tarasov..."

"So that's the way it has to be, is it, lad?"

"Yes, that's the way it has to be, father!"

"And just take note, lad, that I'm not asking you why you have all these names..."

"That's what I like about you, father."

So now you can understand, comrades from posterity, that as well as these chance encounters in the streets of Moscow, now Kolya Gorlov, the best sambo pupil in Chertanovo district, had to get his picture in the evening paper. It's too early to put photos of me in the paper, comrades, much too early. When it's alright, I'll tell you, give you a signal. But for the time being, it's premature!

I should have my photograph taken as much as possible, of course, but it's still a bit too early to print them in papers and magazines. That meeting in Gorky Street, plus the incident with the *Moscow Evening News*, and the bit about the fight in my marks-book were all equally unpleasant for me. But the report about my fight with Maslov was the most unpleasant of all. Actually it all depended on how father looked at it. If he read my marks-book that evening, then went to school the next morning and said nothing to our form-teacher except one splendid sentence worthy of a true Worgravy: "Fights, like wars, can be just or unjust, Zinaida Yefimovna!" And that was all! Then turned on his heel and left the class-room without another word, only stopping at the door to say: "A person should be judged not by his actions, but by the motives behind them!" Then left the room!

Zinaida Yefimovna would get all het up, and the class would get excited. Zinaida Yefimovna would run after father. And the class would run after Zinaida Yefimovna.

"Yevgeny Alexandrovich!" Zinaida Yefimovna would say to my father. "You must excuse us, please, but we don't know what to do with Yuri. He hides all the motives for his actions from us..."

"He probably does so in the interests of the future!" my father would say, bid her a curt farewell, and leave the school.

"Yes, children," Zinaida Yefimovna would say. "We shall have to apologise to Yuri. And as for you, Maslov, I'm ashamed of you, very ashamed indeed."

"Zinaida Yefimovna," Maslov would say. "If I had known that Ivanov hit me in the interests of the future, would I have paid him back like that?"

Yes, but father wasn't ready for a conversation like that. With a deep sigh I went into the bath-room, got out two buckets and began to prepare for my Mercury terminator training. Do you remember that a terminator is the line of separation between light and shade? The terminator of the planet Mercury is the one with the greatest contrast. Judge for yourselves: Mercury is the closest planet to the sun. It has no

atmosphere and does not revolve every twenty-four hours. The temperature on the sunny side is plus five-hundred degrees.

I put my right leg into a bucket of hot water. On the shady side it is minus two-hundred... I put my left leg into a bucket of cold water. Brrr. Not the pleasantest of sensations, I must say. You will have guessed, of course, that the cold water was supposed to represent the temperature of the cold side of Mercury, which is why I put my left leg into a bucket of cold water and my right into a bucket of hot water, that was supposed to represent the temperature of the sunny side. I closed my eyes and tried to imagine that I was on the planet Mercury, on the line of the terminator, instead of in the bath-room. It was an unpleasant feeling. I felt as if two different sensations were tearing me apart. Yes. What was it? "No wind accompanies their flight, no lights on earth them beckon... So they must feel, so they must feel something, but what is it that they feel?" Oooh! I'd like to take the person who wrote that poem and put him bare-legged into hot and cold water...

At that moment there was a ring at the door. It was so loud that it must be a stranger and so insistent that I had to temporarily abandon my "terminatorisation" experiment, squelch into the hall with bare feet and open the door.

On the landing stood Kolesnikov from our class.

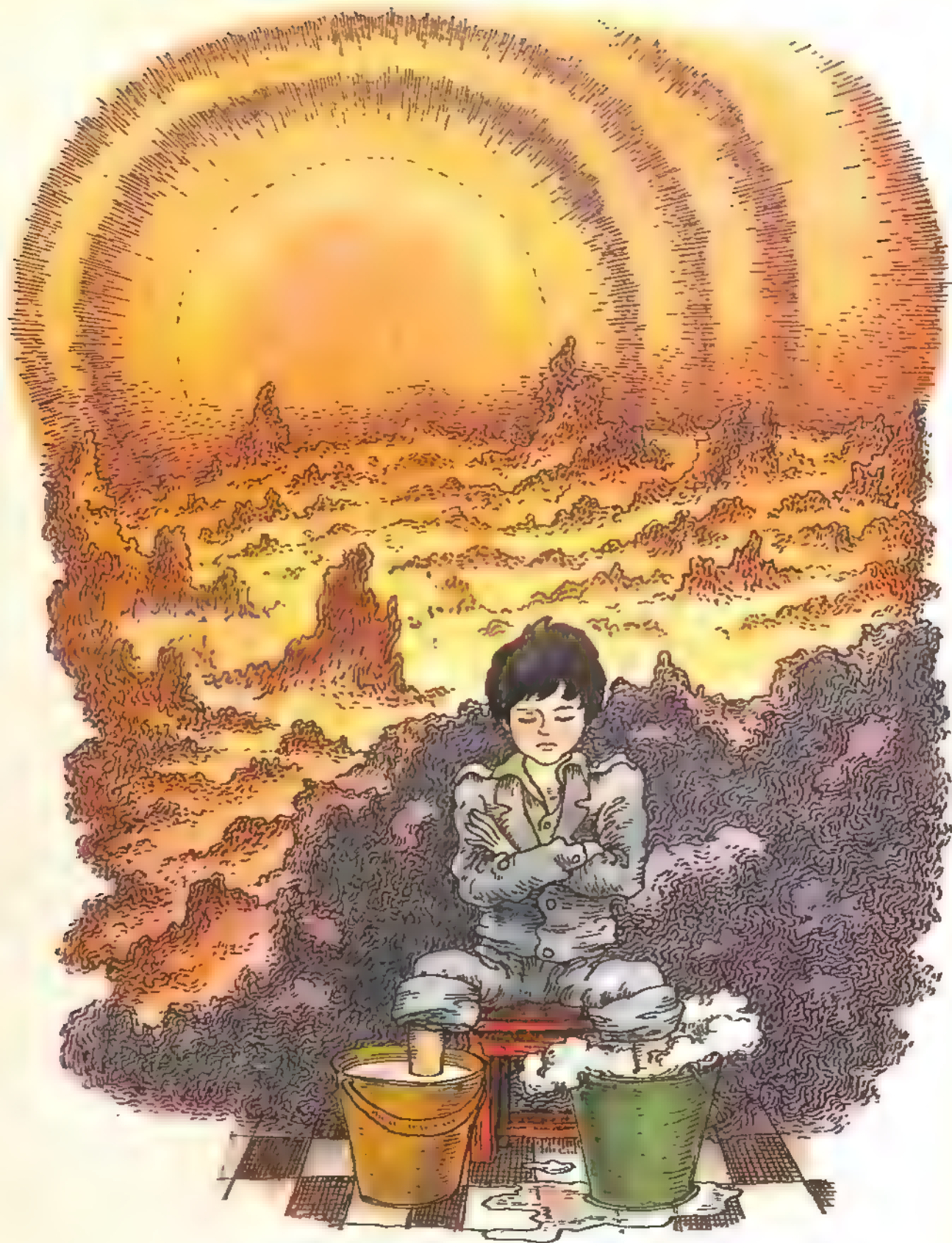
Kolesnikov at once stretched out his long neck and swivelled it round. Then, bending it in a funny way, he cast a suspicious eye over my flushed face and particularly my legs.

"Here's a right anthology of total enigmas for you..." he said. "You know what the Hatteras hexagon is, I expect?"

"Don't ask silly questions, Kolesnikov," I replied coldly, but calmly. "The ocean contains many hidden perils, but nothing terrifies a sailor as much as the Hatteras hexagon" (the strip of sea by the shores of the American state of North Carolina, to the north of the so-called Bermuda triangle). "Within living memory alone no less than thousands of vessels have disappeared in that area."

"Or what about the case of the Carrol Deering," Kolesnikov warmed up. "The schooner, built at the shipyards in the state of Maine in 1921, suddenly disappeared as it was crossing the Atlantic. It was discovered in the 'hexagon' area. The sails were hoisted on all five masts, but there was not a soul on board."

"Yes, there was not a soul on board," I took over. "And according to such a source as the *National Geographic*, the patrol launch that found



the schooner did not discover anyone on board except two cats. There was some freshly cooked food in the galley. The fate of the crew remains a mystery to this very day."

"So you know that too!" laughed Kolesnikov and added with a sly grin: "But I know something that you couldn't know..."

"And what might that be?" I moved threateningly towards Kolesnikov.

"What you couldn't know," Kolesnikov began to drawl, "what you couldn't know or even imagine..."

"What is it that I couldn't imagine?"

"Whether your mother's got any bay leaf or not," Kolesnikov laughed smugly.

Very calmly and quite imperceptibly, of course, I cursed myself for letting Kolesnikov get the better of me like that.

"Can't you ever find anything worth saying, Kolesnikov?"

Kolesnikov stared hard at me, but I held his gaze, thinking: "Could he have passed that poem on to me from his anthology of total enigmas?" So we went on staring at each other in silence without blinking an eyelash. After a minute Kolesnikov's eyes began to run, but I deliberately went on staring at him without blinking for another three minutes, or perhaps even five, after he had blinked. Actually I would gladly have given that Kolesnikov a good thumping instead of the bay leaf and "who can outstare who". Fancy interrupting such an important experiment for a bit of bay leaf for soup.

"Perhaps she has got some bay leaf, eh?" asked Kolesnikov, craning his neck, peering over my shoulder into the bath-room and sniffing. "Why is one of your legs so red and the other so white?" he asked even more suspiciously. "That's from the anthology of total enigmas, eh?"

At that moment who should come up the stairs carrying her shopping bags but mother. Kolesnikov quickly relieved her of both bags and followed her into the kitchen, still muttering about the bay leaf. Cursing Kolesnikov for making me lose so much time, I closed the bath-room door and waited for the spy to get his bay leaf and make himself scarce. "Bay leaf, bay leaf," I thought. "One day you'll hang a wreath of it round my neck. But the bay leaf is only an excuse, of course. Kolesnikov definitely wants to find out something. Silly ass. With a neck like that he should join a circus. He could swivel it round a hundred and eighty degrees there."

"Get lost," I said to Kolesnikov, opening the door.

Holding the bay leaf in his hand Kolesnikov sidled onto the landing, like a crab, but I still managed to slam the door so that it caught him

at the last moment in the small of the back. I watched him go through the key-hole, then turned the key in the lock. Kolesnikov cursed, and I went to the bath-room to pour the cold and hot terminators of the planet Mercury out of the buckets.

Memoir Eight

"I'VE FOUND THAT GIRLS' PROXIMITY..."

At this point mother appeared in the hall. I bumped into her in the bath-room doorway. She looked at my black eye, caught hold of my ears with both hands and said:

"What's that under your eye, Yuri?"

(She could see it was a bruise! She knew it was a bruise! And yet she still asked!) Instead of replying I took my satchel into the living room, tipped my books onto the table, brought my marks-book from Father's room, opened it and showed it to mother in silence. Then I went into the bath-room.

"Who gave you that bruise?" mother asked again.

Mother's a real brick! Never in my life has she ever blamed me for anything I have done. Because she does not know, but she senses what serious, inhumanly difficult, one might even say, heroic motives lay behind my actions.

"I got this black eye from the drama club!" I said.

"Oh, you did, did you?" she said behind the door. "So now they've started attacking you with whole clubs, have they? You'll soon have the whole school descending on you." Mother came into the bath-room. "Do you still need that?" she asked me, nodding her head in the direction of the buckets. "Or can I empty them?"

"You can empty them," I said, taking a five-copeck piece out of my pyjama pocket and placing it on my black eye in front of the mirror. Mother also looked in the mirror over my shoulder and stared hard at the black eye. Since father hadn't come home from work yet, and according to my schedule I was supposed to be preparing for lights out, I went off to my room.

"Wait a minute, Yuri," said mother, taking me by the hand and leading me to the telephone. "I'll get on to your teacher now... Wait a minute."

"You know nothing must interfere with my sleep, mother," I said.

"Yes, I know," said mother. "But your father will be home soon. We'll need to have some details."

My wrist-watch alarm sounded lights out.

"It's disgraceful!" said mother. "A whole club attacked you! I'll make your father go up to the school with me."

My wrist-watch alarm went on ringing. I turned the dial towards mother and said:

"Tomorrow."

There was a ring at the door.

"That's your father..." mother stopped dialing and tapped the marks-book with her finger. "All the same perhaps you'd better..."

"Tomorrow," I said and, making a gesture that was something between "good-night" and "good-bye," went off to my room, dived under the blanket and began to relax yoga-style.

Then I heard the sound of my parents' voices in the hall.

"Our country hears, our country knows, where flies her son above the clouds..." sang father. Father was in a good mood. He always sings that song when he's in a good mood. He went into his room, and for a while all was quiet in there. I heard mother tiptoe up to the door and whisper affectionately:

"Why don't you come and have supper with us, Yuri? It's still quite early. It would be nice for your father..."

I said nothing and went on relaxing. All was still quiet in father's room. He had obviously not taken a look at my marks-book, yet that was why he was silent. In fact he was wrong to wait. Because any minute now I could do my last bit of relaxing, then the alarm of my twelve-jewel Signal wrist-watch would go off and that would mean lights out. After that no power on earth could make me ignore the strict schedule of my log-book. In the middle of my relaxation some faint signals from the next room told me that father must have deciphered the entry in my marks-book and, judging by everything, was telling mother what he thought about it, while mother, judging by her voice, was defending me as usual. At this very moment my alarm sounded lights out. I began to fall asleep quickly. But then I heard the door of my room fly open and father's angry voice shouted:

"Up you get and quick march into the dining room!"

Mother was standing next to father, hissing at him:

"Don't wake him up! Don't wake him up!"

Father must have repeated his sentence about fifteen times. But you,

comrades of posterity, already know something about my character: if there is no room in my self-training programme for a conversation with my father, such a conversation will not take place.

"Don't wake him up," said mother yet again.

"What do you mean—don't wake him up—with this written in his marks-book!"

"It must be a misunderstanding," said mother. "Let him sleep now, and we'll sort it out tomorrow."

"Not tomorrow," I said from under the blanket. "In about twenty-five years' time."

"I bet there's only one person in the world who can sleep after having that written in his marks-book. And that one person is my son..."

"As far as 'only one person' is concerned, you have said something remarkably, even prophetically true," I thought. "The only person in the world... These solitary people ... no wind accompanies their flight," I went on thinking, but that must have been in my sleep, because I couldn't think in verse when I was awake:

*No wind accompanies their flight
No lights on earth them beckon...
So they must feel,
So they must feel something,
But what is it that they feel?*

And I also heard father say to mother:

"Why don't we ever go out together to the theatre or at least to the cinema? Why is it always so deathly quiet at home? Why doesn't anyone laugh? Why isn't there any music? Why doesn't anyone sing? Why doesn't anyone come and see my son?"

But perhaps I dreamed that...

Judging from some very tattered pages in Yuri Ivanov's memoirs the next day he woke up at five a. m., and what he did before school was recorded, as always, in the non-extant log-book. Then a few broken sentences suggest that he went to school. In the algebra lesson he must have tried to teach the algebra teacher something, because an entry to this effect was made in his marks-book by the teacher. Another entry in the book reads: "Explained his own version of the origin of man (actually quite an interesting one) to the natural history teacher, but in reply to

the question 'What is the average life expectancy?' said 'I don't know!' I regard this answer as most impertinent." Then follows the teacher's signature.

Judging from his notes, after lessons Yuri Ivanov found another piece of paper with a new poem on it in his pocket. The text of the poem was not very distinct, but we have managed to decipher it. Here it is.

*Man found out that simple friction
Could produce real sparks of fire.
Now, like Newton,
(It's no fiction)
I've found a source of gravity
That quite simply terrifies me.
"Stop, oh, stop! I just don't see
What your discovery can be..."
I've found that girls' proximity
Can't be avoided, woe is me!*

*Man found out that dear old Mother
Earth is in perpetual motion.
Now, like Newton,
(It's no wild notion)
I've found a source of gravity
That quite simply terrifies me.
"Stop, oh, stop! I just don't see
What your discovery can be..."
I've found that girls' proximity
Can't be avoided, woe is me!*

*A thing called atmospheric pressure
Pushes on us all the time.
Now, like Newton,
(It has no measure)
I've found a source of gravity
Only it's quite unearthly for me.
"Stop, oh, stop! I just don't see
What your discovery can be..."
I've found that girls' proximity
Can't be avoided, woe is me!*

On the two following pages, which contain a sort of commentary on the poem, the words are too blurred to be legible, but on the third page the following text has been reconstructed:

"...Went to get some flowers from Pelageya Vassilievna. She is ill, that's why she hasn't been selling them. Got some medicine from the chemist for her, then she wrote me an authorisation to sell flowers in her place..."

The next thirty or so lines are illegible, then we read:

"...I walked over the earth, that large, permanent magnet, with a huge bunch of gladioli for sale. Crossing by the underground subway near Dzerzhinskaya metro station, I chose a busy corner (just opposite the statue of Fyodorov, the first printer) by the Children's World shop and began to sell the flowers. It was an excellent spot. You had a good view of the main street and the side road, so you could not be taken unawares by a policeman or a vigilante. When they did appear, I hid quickly, mixing with the crowd of passers-by.

"I must admit that I have a certain amount of experience in selling flowers.

"But this was not my lucky day. All the time I kept having to shut up shop—policemen kept appearing and sometimes I even had to hide from them down a side street. Of course, I would never have got caught with my gladioli if it hadn't been for..."

At this point the page ended, and on the following two pages not a single letter could be made out. Everything was quite illegible and only at the end of the second page could you make out the following passage:

"I shouldn't have run away from the policeman. It's so lucky that they took me to the police-station. Why didn't I think of going there before and telling them about..."

Then came another illegible bit. Further on, two pages later, Yuri describes being at the police-station, in the children's room, and talking to a policewoman.

"At the speed you run you should take up athletics," she said to me. "But here you are selling flowers."

"By the way," I rapped out. "Would you kindly record in your report that both before and after I ran my pulse was fifty-two, strong and regular, without any vasomotion or vegetation!"

"Yes, yes," agreed the policewoman in charge of the children's room.



"You were trading illicitly in flowers with a kind of super-human composure, I would say."

"I wasn't trading illicitly," I replied. "I help Pelageya Vassilievna. She has permission, and she asked me to help her, because she's ill. She even wrote me out an authorisation."

"Well, where is the authorisation?" asked the policewoman.

"I lost it." I really had dropped it somewhere.

"Don't you try to talk me round," said the policewoman. "Now tell me your name, where you live, why you were selling flowers and where you got the gladioli from."

I didn't answer these questions, of course. If I started explaining I would end up by being asked to disclose all the secrets of my Worgravy, Coconin and Super-X training. But when the policewoman insisted that I tell her my name, I said as diplomatically as possible:

"Wait a bit. You'll soon find out."

"How soon?"

"In about thirty, or perhaps even twenty years."

"But I shall be an old-age pensioner by then," said the woman with a crafty smile.

She was trying to make me feel sorry for her: a young woman like her talking about a pension. But I wasn't falling for that.

"You know what," I advised her. "Instead of trying to find out who I am, you should concentrate on remembering me and write about me when you get home..."

"Well, what shall I write about you?"

"Some memoirs..."

"Memoirs?" She even laughed out loud. "Memoirs about how you sold gladioli? By the way, there you are selling flowers, but I bet you don't know that in tsarist times the revolutionaries used to carry posters at demonstrations saying: 'Bread and roses!' Have you heard about that?"

"A most unusual experiment began recently in the Department of Agriculture conservatory at the university," I said. "A computer controls an automatic device which can replace man in many respects in the cultivation of irises, tulips and gladioli. The computer-controlled device moves round the walls of a conservatory eight-hundred metres square along rails and carries out many different operations. You haven't heard about it, have you?"

"Haven't heard about it?" said the woman. "Of course, I have."

"Who from?" I asked in surprise.

"From you."

For perhaps a millionth of a second I was taken aback by this smart reply, but the policewoman went on:

"You know something about computers and their uses, but you don't know much about yourself."

"What do you mean?" I said huffily.

"Well, you don't know your name or where you live," she persisted.

"Why don't you tell me who wrote this poem?" I said taking the piece of paper out of my inside pocket. "Scientists say that a person's handwriting reflects his personality and that each person has his own distinctive handwriting. Is that right? Here I am trying to worgravitise myself, and someone's doing their level best to nonworgravitise me!" I blurted out unthinkingly.

"What's that?" The policewoman pricked up her ears.

"Oh, nothing ... that's just the way I talk," I bit my tongue.

"You talk fine," said the woman. "But you behave..."

I didn't let her finish her sentence.

So now, comrades of posterity, you will understand why I was at first upset, and then delighted that I had been taken to the police-station. I should have gone there with the poem long ago.

The woman read all three poems and said:

"Why do you need to find out the author from the handwriting? They're good poems..."

"Because they haven't been signed," I explained.

"Why should they be signed?"

"Because..." I said. "Well, what would you say if during the investigation of a crime your policemen didn't need suppleness..."

"Do you know what suppleness is too?"

"Suppleness," I rapped out, "is flexibility of the body. It is developed by special exercises that enable one to increase the mobility of the spine and the elasticity of the interspinal cartilaginous discs, the whole articulatory system and the muscles."

"So we don't need suppleness?" the woman asked me. "Well, what do we need?"

"We need a Coconin that is possessed by ... or, rather, will soon be possessed by a certain person," I corrected myself. "A Coconin is a complete collection of natural inventions," I explained, not waiting for her to ask, and immediately began explaining the main thing to her. "During the investigation of a crime the policeman trots out of the

police-station. He is a human blood-hound. He has an excellent upper scent, like a blood-hound. What is upper scent?" I asked the policewoman.

"Upper scent is the ability of a dog to follow scent in the air, not from tracks on the ground," the policewoman replied smartly.

"Correct," I praised her. "Then the policeman peers into the darkness, like a cat! What do you know about cats?" I asked the policewoman.

"They can see eight times better than a human being in the dark, but cats see everything in black and white only!" the policewoman replied without hesitation.

"Very good!" I praised her and went on: "Then the policeman sets off in pursuit of the criminal as fast as a cheetah. The criminal runs into the forest, the policeman soars up into the sky like a falcon and swoops down on the enemy like a kite! What do you know about the cheetah, the falcon and the kite?"

"Wait a minute! Who's interrogating whom?" the policewoman suddenly exclaimed.

After this a whole page was missing, and on the next page was the following remark by the policewoman:

"Comrade Captain. The detained person has started interrogating me! Please send someone to help. I can't manage on my own!"

It was impossible to make out the next two pages apart from a few words here and there. The captain evidently came to the policewoman's assistance, and the conversation was then conducted in a threesome. This conversation has also disappeared, incidentally. Only three passages from it have survived.

"*And so, to ensure that our police possess what I have been telling you, you must realise that it all depends on one person, namely, me. That is why I can't, I would even say do not have the right, to tell you my name. Because walls have ears, you know.*"

"Well, I never," said the captain. "I've seen and heard some things in my time, but..."

Then come a few phrases by Yuri Ivanov.

"You've taken one hour five minutes from my log-book. Where will I get that time from now?"

"If I were you I wouldn't hinder me, I would protect me!" I advised the police officers.

"Now listen here, my lad. Instead of telling us what you would do with us, just tell us what we're to do with you. Tell us your name and where you live," said the captain, when I was about to leave.

For the umpteenth time I greeted these words with a contemptuous silence followed by: "Find out for yourselves!" Whereupon he said: "We'll do just that!" Then he grabbed the collar of my check shirt, turned it over and looked at the back of my neck, as if my name and address were written there. Actually, if he asked me nicely, I would put that captain on my list of Worgravys! You can't imagine how he caught me out with that collar. There was nothing written on my neck, of course, but there was a laundry mark on the collar. And it was the easiest thing in the world for the captain to find out my particulars from the laundry mark. He just phoned the laundry and they told him...

At this point the memoirs of the meeting with the policewoman in charge of the children's room broke off. So it all remains a mystery. Another ten pages are missing, then come the memoirs of the evening when Yuri Ivanov was preparing to go to sleep after some Coconin programme training.

Memoir Nine

I'LL GIVE YOU TEN MINUTES TO TALK TO ME!

That day, which had been a normal one for me in terms of stress, I decided to bring forward sleep on my schedule. "I am closing my eyes and relaxing my muscles. My body is as limp as a rag doll..." You may not know, comrades of posterity, that the Olympic champion Yuri Vlassov used those words to describe his state a few moments before he performed a record-winning lift. It was from Yuri Vlassov that I learned to understand this state—the close proximity of an intense outburst of physical energy to complete calm and total relaxation. All man's physical activity is the work of different groups of muscles (for more about this see my log-book). I have just started remembering not how I relaxed, but how my father's voice from the next room prevented me from relaxing properly. When I put my marks-book on his desk before going to bed (remember: "Tried to teach the teacher... Gave a lecture... Did not reply when asked what was the average life expectancy!"), he picked it up and said:

"Ah, another instalment from the great adventure series. We'll certainly have a read of that..."

I left the room, and father was quiet for so long that I thought he must be learning my marks-book by heart. Then I heard him say something to mother, after which mother went out of father's room, slamming the door. Then for some reason father began to talk to himself out loud. I had never noticed him do that before. I was already repeating the eleventh relaxation command to myself: "My fingers and wrists are relaxed and warm." Suddenly the door of my room opened and father shouted loudly:

"Are you coming out or aren't you? I've been calling you for goodness knows how long!"

I continued my self-inducing relaxation exercises, pretending to be asleep, although I went on repeating the eleventh command to myself: "My fingers and wrists are relaxed and warm!" But father also went on repeating his command loudly. At last I could stand it no longer and said loudly as if in my sleep:

"My fingers and wrists are relaxed and warm..."

At that moment mother came into the room and also said loudly: "Listen! There's an interesting item in the newspaper:

"In this connection I recall an episode with an eight-former pupil from a Moscow school. He was giving everyone an awful lot of trouble. He was always disturbing the lessons with his pranks. Then one day on a class outing in the countryside near Moscow, he suddenly showed himself in a most unexpected light. One of the girls slipped, fell into a cold autumn stream and got drenched to the skin. The boy helped her and even gave her his own warm clothes so that she wouldn't catch cold..."

"Oh, no," I said, sitting up in bed, but keeping my eyes closed. "In such circumstances no Coconin, Worgravy or Super-X could relax properly. In such conditions all you can do is get tensed to breaking point."

"What's he talking about? What is he blathering about all the time? What are these Coconins, Worgravys and Super-Duper-Xs? Can anyone in the world please tell me what all this means?" shouted father, and then went back to his: "Are you going to get up or aren't you?"

I looked at my watch. It said twelve o'clock exactly (24 hours 00 minutes). For a few seconds I racked my brains about what to do next. I couldn't break my routine. Yet, judging by the threatening note in my father's

voice, I couldn't refuse to obey him either. It was insoluble. But it couldn't be! For us, super-cosmonauts, nothing is ever insoluble. There was a solution! Very well. I would get up, but I would show them all that I would not even spare my own father. We would have a stupid conversation which I would record on my tape-recorder, so that later posterity could see, or rather hear, how nobody, not even my own parents, understood me.

I got up from the bed, without opening my eyes. Groping around on the table for two tennis balls, I put them in my pyjama pocket, picked up the tape-recorder, felt my way along the wall to the door and went into the living room. Feeling for the back of a chair, I lowered myself onto the seat and said:

"Centenarians, of whom there are more than two thousand in Georgia, have a predominantly vegetable diet. In the western areas of Georgia, for example, old people do not eat soup, which is rich in extractive matter. Chicken, beef and sometimes mutton is eaten by them mainly in boiled form. Raw vegetables, fruit, fresh herbs and dried herbs rich in vitamin C are a constant item of their diet at all times of the year. Centenarians eat little sugar and much honey. The regular consumption of milk, cheese, vegetables and fruit creates a natural barrier against sclerosis. This explains the low incidence of arteriosclerosis in centenarians."

"If our son can say things like that when he is asleep," said mother proudly, "just think what he can say when he is awake!"

"Let them think I'm asleep," I thought to myself. "Perhaps I only talk, think, act and live in general like a Coconin in my sleep, but when I wake up..." I was afraid to think what I might do when I woke up, so I said:

"I'll give you ten minutes to talk to me." I put the microphone on the table and switched on the tape-recorder under the table without anyone noticing.

"No ultimatums, if you don't mind," my father said menacingly.

"Yuri!" exclaimed my mother in an alarmed voice. "Why don't you open your eyes?"

"It's not in my schedule," I replied.

Mother began to get all het-up about whether they might have damaged my sight in the fight, but father said:

"Let him keep them closed. At least I shall think he's ashamed to look me in the eye..."

I said nothing, of course. But in order not to waste time I began to do

four things at once. Snooze, listen to father, squeeze the tennis ball in my pyjama pocket with my left hand, and exercise the muscle in my right foot by pressing down on my toe!

A most unpleasant silence ensued, which was eventually broken by father's voice.

"Say something!" he said, evidently addressing me.

I kept quiet.

"Very well," said father. "Before beginning our talk I shall do a quick stock-taking of our son's face: contemptuously pursed mouth—one, scratches—five, or is it six? Six scratches. One bruise. Two closed eyes..."

I ground my teeth loud enough to be heard and shut my eyes even more tightly.

"Yuri," mother asked me in an alarmed voice again. "Why don't you open your eyes?"

"It's not in my schedule," I replied as before, but in a tone that made father start up in his chair.

Mother again began to get het-up about whether the hooligan club had done me some serious damage, but father managed to stop her.

"Let's have our talk," said father.

Another most unpleasant silence ensued, which I had no intention of breaking.

"Say something!" Father was evidently addressing me again.

"What shall I say? You ask me some questions then!" I said, squeezing the tennis balls with my right foot and left hand.

I would bet my life that after this father looked at mother, and she began to make signs to him with her hands. I could sense this by the movement of the air.

"Stop shaking your hand and foot," ordered father.

They're forever saying: "Life is short! Don't waste time! Don't fritter your time away!" But when you start "not wasting" or "not frittering", they find fault with you.

"Take your hands out of your pockets when you're talking to grown-ups! And open your eyes too!" said father, raising his voice.

"No," said mother. "I still believe that whatever the teacher wrote, our Yuri is a very serious boy."

"Charles Darwin was a serious boy too, and he lived to regret it!" retorted father.

But father was wrong here. It was the first time I had ever heard anyone being blamed for being serious. Frivolity is a different matter.

"Don't say that, Zhenya," said mother. "Even Yuri's enemies recognize that he is extremely talented at everything."

"Some people," said father. "Some people," he repeated, "are endowed from birth with the doubtful talent of making life a misery for everyone around them!"

On hearing this I despaired once and for all of ever hearing father say: "Fights, like wars, can be just or unjust." Through half-closed eyes I looked at the dial of my watch. Three minutes had passed since the start of our talk. I wondered how father would manage to fit it into seven minutes, if he hadn't started talking about the marks-book yet.

"I repeat," said father, following this by a long pause.

"He's only got seven minutes left, and he's still repeating himself," I thought.

"Yesterday a whole club of them attacked him!" mother chimed in. "So it's not surprising that he had to use his fists. Everyone has the right to self-defence by law!"

"I repeat," said father, "for the third time..."

But this time too mother would not let father finish his sentence.

"Take the French and the Italians, for example," she said. "From time to time they just have to let off steam by losing their temper or shouting..."

"I repeat," said father, taking no notice of mother and raising his voice. "I repeat for the fourth time..."

At this very moment the alarm of my watch went off. I got up from the chair. Taking advantage of the fact that father was still thinking about something, I announced:

"You've got two minutes left, father, but don't worry. You can tell me the rest tomorrow morning."

"What do you mean? Why tomorrow morning?" exclaimed father, taken aback. "He kindly gives me permission not to worry!"

"The boy's tired," mother backed me up. "Let's talk to him tomorrow morning. Let him have a rest now."

"No tomorrows!" shouted father. "Only today!" he continued in a clipped and loud voice. "You probably lecture your teachers because you think you know more than all of them put together."

"But I really had solved the problem my way. The teacher didn't know you could solve it like that. And I solved it quicker than he did," I said in my defence.

"But why wouldn't you answer the question about the average life

expectancy?" asked father angrily. "Tell me: how long do people live on average?"

"I don't know," I replied. "And I don't want to know. Because a Worgravy knows everything and can do everything that he wants to know and do!"

"Oh, my goodness!" groaned father. "Who can tell me why my son doesn't know and doesn't want to know such a simple thing?"

"You will find out why through the mass media ... with time," I explained sternly.

"But I want to know now!" exclaimed father. "And anyway I've looked in all the foreign dictionaries and the word 'Worgravy' just isn't there. What is a Worgravy? Alright, write it down," laughed father, after looking at mother, and then turned back to me again. "While she's writing down the nonsense that you talk, you can just stop being as obstinate as a mule and tell me how long people live on average."

Father repeated his question several times, and I also replied several times in clear, concise Russian that I did not know how long people live on average. And even when father said that he would help me to answer and explained that on average people live to seventy-five, I still said that I did not know how many years people live on average. This had such a terrible effect on father, that I even began to feel sorry for him. After his next "How many years, for goodness sake, do people live on average?" I decided to break the oath I had sworn to myself to answer this question only with the words "I don't know".

At this point, dear comrades of posterity, I must explain why, or rather, what motives there were behind my reluctance to answer the question about the average life expectancy of the human being with anything but "I don't know". Wasn't this reply indeed a piece of stupid, mulish obstinacy, as my father had hinted. I do not know, dear comrades of posterity, what your life expectancy is, but in my day it was a real disgrace! Judge for yourselves. In my day people lived on average to seventy or seventy-five. And would you like to know my opinion about why it was so little? I had actually intended to publish my ideas during another historical period of my life, but I began to feel sorry for Father, and anyway, perhaps I didn't really have the right to conceal this discovery of mine from my parents. After all, they would probably live on average to seventy-five too, not like me to ... well, say, as a rough guide, to seven hundred. Not at once, of course, but gradually, with time.

At this point, dear comrades of posterity, I ran to my room and

fetches an exercise book on the cover of which was a seal with "Top secret" written on it and underneath in brackets "For posterity". Below this was a note explaining why when asked what the average life expectancy on earth was I had always answered "I don't know".

So, I cleared my throat and was about to read it out aloud, not too loudly in case the neighbours next-door accidentally overheard, but at the very last moment I changed my mind. Let's assume that I did read it. "Dear comrades of posterity! I, of course, and you, of course, know that man lives to seventy or seventy-five on Earth. But precisely why he lives only to seventy or seventy-five nobody knows but me. In my opinion people live to such an age, such a young age, I would say, because they have almost conspired to believe that at seventy-five a person is old. Two years is an infant, ten is a boy, seventeen is a youth, thirty is an adult, fifty to sixty is an elderly person, and seventy to seventy-five is an old man. I am firmly convinced that if people did not know that a person was old at seventy or seventy-five, they would not feel old at this age. Moreover, I am equally firmly convinced that if you took a child from Earth and sent it to a planet where the inhabitants lived until a thousand, and the child did not know that he would be old at seventy, that child would also be able to live to a thousand with the others." At this point I would take my eyes off the exercise book, direct a confident and triumphant glance at my parents and say: "Now you can see why I always replied 'I don't know' when anyone asked me about the average life expectancy of human beings!"

There would be a long pause, during which mother would jump up from her chair, clap her hands and cry:

"Well I never! It's a brilliant scientific discovery! A sensation! Now I understand why I feel much better than usual when I say I am younger than I really am!"

"Rubbish!" father would say. "It's not a discovery at all. It's sheer obstinacy, that's what it is. Even if you do have your own opinion about the length of human life, you should tell your ideas to the teacher, not just say 'I don't know'! Anyway we're not talking about that at the moment. We are talking about my son's disgraceful behaviour at school! And I'd like to know what is the matter with my son! Do I or do I not have the right to know what is the matter with my son?"

That is why, anticipating my father's attitude to my discovery, I did not read out what was written in the exercise book, but merely said once more: "I don't know."

"That's the limit," said father. "I don't want to talk to this impossible child anymore."

While I switched off and packed up the tape-recorder, father wrote something very agitatedly in my marks-book. He signed it even more agitatedly and handed me the book without a word. I took it, also in silence, but with complete composure, of course, and left the room. While I was closing the door, I heard father say to mother:

"I don't know what to do with him, or what to do with you either."

Father couldn't have thought of a better phrase, and I will now tell you why, after I have read what he wrote in my marks-book.

Here it is. "I must inform you that my son's behaviour at home is no better than at school. Evidently we shall have to take some joint measures."

On reading this, I could not restrain myself from going into the dining room where father was still sitting at the table taking some medicine.

"Some people are like octopuses," I said. "Only too willing at moments of danger to hide behind a curtain of ink with statements like: 'I must inform you that my son's behaviour at home is no better than at school. Evidently we shall have to take some joint measures.' And that sort of thing."

"By the way, an interesting item of information from bionics. The inky liquid emitted by the octopus **does** more than simply hide it. It is poisonous and makes whatever is pursuing the octopus lose its sense of smell temporarily: so it cannot scent the octopus and sometimes even bumps into it." As always, of course, I said all this to stun my father and paralyse him with my knowledge, and I was successful.

"Some people," my stunned and almost paralysed father replied to my "some people". "Some people even call their own father an octopus." After which he had something approaching a fit of hysterics.

Unfortunately I lost my temper a bit, too, or perhaps it was the result of slight fatigue. Anyway I could not restrain myself and flared up.

"That's the limit!" I said. "I refuse ... I simply cannot in these circumstances! Let someone else carry out my task! I refuse! I have nerves too, you know. Not made of iron, or even steel, but ... titanium. Still they're nerves all the same..."

I rushed away to my room, still angry, with mother rushing after me. While raging, I put a hand on my pulse. It was just the same as ever: fifty-two beats per minute.

"Let them entrust that super-super task to someone else!"

"That's right," mother supported me. "Let them entrust that super-super task to someone else."

"They'll never find anyone else," I said, on reflection. "Of course, they'll never find anyone else. But I simply can't ... in these conditions of total misunderstanding! Nobody else could in these conditions! And precisely because nobody else could, I am their only hope! Precisely because nobody else could, I will! So everything continues as before! And I continue too. You can go now, mother! Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

Mother gave me a kiss, tiptoed out of the room, and must have immediately started defending me in the dining room.

"If you don't find my arguments convincing," she was saying to my father, "listen to what they say in this magazine on the same subject. 'Lack of confidence makes life difficult and is an obstacle to success. The confident person achieves more. Because a feeling of confidence is usually accompanied by the appearance of the so-called stenic emotions (from the Greek *stenos* meaning "strength"), which enhance a person's physical and psychic abilities. Without belief in his strength a sportsman, for example, will never win. Overestimation of your opponent and underestimation of your own powers almost always leads to failure.'"

"That's all very well," said father. "But you just listen to this. A person must avoid extremes." And he also read something out to mother, probably from another magazine. "'But if a person's confidence is excessive and not justified by his real abilities, it becomes a negative quality, developing into self-confidence. The self-confident person undertakes tasks for which he is not fitted or not prepared. People who overestimate themselves like this are frequently boastful and arrogant. They may cause considerable harm.'"

"This is impossible," I said out loud. "Everyone seems to be conspiring to ruin my second-by-second planning schedule. Now I shall have to plan my life in retrospect, not in advance: first I'll do something, then I'll schedule it in my log-book."

I should have been sleeping, and I would have been if my father hadn't created this scene. Now I would have to listen to the tape on which my so-called talk with father was recorded. And I'd have to write some more memoirs about myself in code. I should ask father to sign the text of today's scene to confirm that it was a correct record of what had taken place. But the text would be in code. One look at it and father would probably fly off the handle. "What's all this double-

dutch nonsense you're sticking under my nose!" and so on and so forth. Never mind, we'd do without his signature. Particularly as it was all recorded on tape.

No one can deny a tape, comrades of posterity! I rewound the tape and pressed "play", but there was not a sound. So it hadn't recorded. What an awful waste of time! Perhaps I could ask father to do the scene for me over again, specially for posterity. Posterity would never believe that I had had to live, study, work and train in such inhuman conditions with such a total lack of understanding. I listened. Father was not asleep yet. His voice could still be heard clearly from the other room.

"Imagine an over-confident young doctor, say. It never occurs to him that it would be a good idea to check his diagnosis and seek the advice of more experienced colleagues. As a result a wrong diagnosis is made and wrong treatment prescribed. And are over-confident people pleasant to deal with? To live, and work with?"

"I wonder why father has suddenly started talking about doctors," I thought.

I got the tape-recorder ready to record once more and tested it.

"Testing. One-two-three! Testing. One-two-three!"

I played it back and everything was alright. So I went into the dining room...

Memoir Ten

HIS EXCELLENCY HUMAN ELECTRICITY

In the dining room father was reading something from a magazine to mother.

"They are difficult to deal with. They always know everything, are incapable of self-criticism, cannot tolerate being contradicted and keep cutting into the conversation. And they never notice that they have upset or humiliated other people. If over-confidence sometimes leads to success, this is usually accidental and has no firm basis. So they are not worth envying."

Without waiting for father to finish, I said:

"We've got to repeat it, father!"

"Repeat what?" he asked in surprise.

"The scene," I explained.

"What scene?"

"We've got to repeat the scene that you created here in front of me," I said.

"What scene?" father asked again, goggling at me.

"The one that ... we had here in the dining room just now," I explained.

"Yes, I call it a scene, and we've got to repeat it word for word."

"Repeat it?" father exclaimed, even more surprised. "Why repeat it?"

"The tape-recorder didn't work. I'll write down our lines and we'll repeat them right from the beginning."

I sat down at the table and, as always, began doing three things at once (writing, talking to father and squeezing a tennis ball with my left hand). I wrote down word for word everything we had said before.

I can write simultaneously with both hands, even different texts, but if I had done that it would have reduced father to hysterics. So I wrote quickly, in the normal way, with my right hand only.

The text of our talk was soon reproduced and I handed it to father, saying:

"Here is everything you said to me, but before we record it you should rehearse the father's part properly."

"What part? What father? Before recording what?" father was completely taken aback.

"I'll explain," I said patiently. "Try to deliver your lines a bit more irritably and speak more clearly... And lose your temper good and proper," I advised him.

"What?" shouted father, who had finally realised that I was going to record our recent talk. "I am going to be recorded in my own home, by my own son on a tape-recorder, and he is directing the whole thing, calling my words lines and telling me what to say and even how to say it! Today I'm being recorded, but tomorrow..." At the word "tomorrow" father almost choked. "Tomorrow they'll be filming me too!"

"Hey, wait a minute," I said, and stopped doing two things (writing and training the muscle of my left hand). I liked the sound of father's idea.

Why hadn't I thought of making a documentary film of scene from my life? A real film with a sound track! What could be more authentic than that!

"Wait a minute!" I exclaimed. "That's an ideal! You can sleep today, father, and tomorrow we'll film the scene and record it too."

"Film it tomorrow!" cried father. "I'm not at all sure that someone

isn't filming me today, this very moment, for some reason!" So saying he jumped up, clasped his head in despair and stalked off into his room. "I just can't manage him on my own," came his voice. Suddenly he stuck his head round the half-open door and said: "I warn you that I'm going to ring round all our relatives. I can't manage you on my own—never have and never will! So I'm going to ring your Uncle Petya, and Uncle Misha and Uncle Senya, and then you'll see! With all those uncles we should be able to straighten you out."

"These words and this scene must be recorded and filmed as well," I said. "Never mind, we'll do the filming tomorrow. If I say we're going to film, we will." Whereupon I went off to my room too. "And as for help... It'll be interesting to see how you manage and what you manage."

"By the way," father perked up on the other side of the door. "I wasn't going to tell you, but I will. Uncle Petya's bringing a friend. That friend'll teach you a thing or two. It obviously needs someone like Uncle Petya's friend to induce a bit of common sense in you!"

At the words "induce a bit of common sense in you", I interrupted father by saying loudly:

"Dad, you surely don't believe that..."

"I want to believe it. At least to believe it!" father exclaimed on the other side of the wall, the physically perceptible wall of misunderstanding that had grown up between us some time ago. But walls and Uncle Petya's friend are one thing, whereas induction, or rather, counter-induction is a much more serious matter. On encountering me as the representative of terrestrial civilisation, beings from other planets might also try to induce something extra-terrestrial in me. I had just the thing for dealing with that. Just the job! I went to the bookcase and took out a pamphlet called "Induction in medicine" by a candidate of medical sciences. "Perhaps Uncle Petya's friend who father thinks can induce some common sense in me has something to do with medicine," I thought. "We'd better find out what connection our comrade relatives have with induction." Then I opened the door to the dining room.

"By the way, father," I said, sticking my head through the door, "where did Uncle Petya study?"

"The Lomonosov Institute of Chemical Technology," said father.

"And Uncle Misha?"

"The Timiryazev Agricultural Academy."

"What about Uncle Senya?"

"The Zhukovsky Air Force Academy. Why do you want to know?"

"You'll see," I said.

"In twenty-five years' time?" father asked.

"Before that," I said.

"The Lomonosov Institute of Chemical Technology ... an agricultural college and an Air Force Academy..." I repeated to myself and glanced at the balcony. I thought I saw a shadow flit past the balcony door, but I did not attach any importance to it. I stretched and said:

"What a day. All I need now is to find another poem. I bet I'll lift up the blanket and there'll be a piece of paper with a poem lying on the sheet."

I lifted up the blanket and there on the sheet lay a piece of paper with lines of writing that could only be a poem.

"I'd better see what it says," I said calmly and read it out loud.

*So you've taken on a mission
But it's going badly
And you don't know the reason
Though it's clear to see*

*That it's bad,
Very bad,
If you don't have
Any current.
If you don't have
His Excellency
Human Electricity.*

*"Why won't anything go right?"
You ask lazily.
"Why am I in such a plight?"
Well, the reason's clear to see*

*That it's bad,
Very bad,
If you don't have
Any current.
If you don't have
His Excellency
Human Electricity.*

I liked this last poem about electricity best of all. It was as if someone had been eavesdropping on my thoughts. As if there was an information leak from my brain.

Only a few days ago, in a nature study lesson, I had been thinking about the electric ray. Here is the entry on it from the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia which I know by heart. The ray—a sub-order of fish of the sharklike order. Skin smooth or covered with spikes. Cartilaginous. Head and body flattened in the dorsal-abdominal region. Length of body up to three metres. Weight up to one hundred kilograms. Electric rays (family Torpedinidae). Here you are. His Excellency, the electric ray. Possesses electric organs situated on the sides of the head. Current up to three-hundred volts—seven to eight amperes. Now kindly tell me, comrades of posterity, why the ray needs electricity, when it should really belong to a human of the Coconin-I type, as king of nature. So there was I pacing up and down, wondering where it would be best to put these electric organs on man. I decided the best place would be at the side under the right and left arms. (See the sketch of a Coconin torso in my log-book.) So there was I pacing up and down, racking brains, and wasting all my human electricity, while someone was writing to me:

*So you've taken on a mission
But it's going badly...*

*.
That it's bad,
Very bad,
If you don't have
Any current.
If you don't have
His Excellency
Human Electricity,*

But what about:

*Then as you into battle ride
Your face, dear knight, you must not hide!?*

But what were they? Anonymous idiots! Stupid Mobulidae! I'm not using bad language, comrades of posterity, Mobulidae is the Latin name for devil rays. So Mobulidae are sea devils. At this point I went onto the balcony shouting "Mobulidae!"

Out there I thought I saw my neighbour Kolesnikov-Wryneck camouflaged behind the trellis on his balcony with a pair of binoculars trained on my room.

"Cowards!" I said even louder. "Cowards! You write: 'So as you into battle ride, your face, dear knight, you must not hide. That is the start of bravery.' But you shoot self-made poems at people from dark corners! Go ahead, shoot whole collected works at me!" I exclaimed returning to my room.

At the word "shoot" the door opened, father's frightened face looked in, then disappeared again.

"I'm not afraid! A Worgravy isn't afraid of anything or anyone. The only thing he's afraid of is ... misunderstanding!"

As a Worgravy I believe that if there is understanding between people, it should be complete understanding. If instead of understanding there is complete misunderstanding, that is all the better! For a Worgravy must be able to endure not only physical stress, but moral stress too. Let everything be difficult. It will provide material for press conferences.

QUESTION to Super-Cosmonaut Ivanov from the *IZVESTIA SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT*: Comrade Ivanov, people say that as a child you trained in difficult conditions and met with a, well, a certain lack of understanding from adults. Is that true?

REPLY from the Super-Cosmonaut Ivanov (*simply*): What has been, has been. I shall not conceal it! There are documents. I refer to a school marks-book with "resolutions" from the form teacher and father! There are also tape recordings... (*Laughter*). And some documentary films... (*Applause*.)

QUESTION FROM *THE NEW YORK TIMES SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT* to Super-Cosmonaut Ivanov: Mr Ivanov, it is said that you became the world's one and only Worgravy, Coconin and Super-X, because as a child you went through a course of special training invented by you. Would you kindly tell us the secret of your training?

REPLY from Super-Cosmonaut, Worgravy and Coconin Ivanov: All in good time! (*Laughter. Applause.*)

I was asked some more questions, but by then I was already asleep.

Usually I fall asleep at once and don't dream, but for the first time in my life only the first part of this worked. That is to say, I fell asleep at once as usual, but soon began to dream, which was very rare for me. (How I knew that this was "soon", I shall explain later.)

I dreamed that I was going to Izmailovsky Park as usual to train on



the merry-go-round and centrifuge. I was walking along quite normally, as if I wasn't asleep, looking round to make sure nobody was following me. Suddenly I met Kolesnikov coming towards me. "What are you doing in the park?" he asked. I didn't bother to reply and walked straight past him. Then I looked back and saw that Kolesnikov-Wryneck was turning his head to look at me. At one-hundred-and-eighty degrees (like he does in real life!). I shook a finger at him menacingly. Then he turned his head all three-hundred-and-sixty degrees (that was like a dream, of course) and disappeared. I went up to the booking-office to get a ticket. Instead of the ticket girl there was ... that girl from our class, the one who might be a space stewardess. But I still gave my tiger-like stare—straight through her—and handed her the money without a word. Suddenly she said to me: "It's free for you today, Ivanov." "All the better," I replied. Then I walked up to the gate and saw that instead of the ticket collector there was Maslov with his crowd of physicists and poets. And instead of a children's roundabout there was a real centrifuge—a long horizontal lever with a counter-balance on one end and a cosmonaut's cabin on the other, although it was a funny shape. I was a bit surprised, of course, but I didn't show it. I walked up to the centrifuge (like a cat to an aquarium). Then I took a look at it. The cabin was very strange. A foreign one, I expect. There were four ribs in front and something big sticking out of it. "What do you think, Ivanov?" Maslov asked me. "Which company made the centrifuge?" But I wasn't to be tricked by such a childish question. I know as much about centrifuges as any adult, and not only in my sleep, like Maslov. "This centrifuge was most likely made by the Lockheed company," I said. The poets and physicists laughed like mad. Then Maslov said very loudly, as if into a huge microphone and as if to shame me before all and sundry: "Not the Lockheed Company, but the Figheed Company, because it's a centrifig, not a centrifuge!" I looked furiously at the cabin and saw that the four ribs were four bent fingers, and the big thing sticking up between them was a thumb making a rude sign. So Maslov had been right. It wasn't a centrifuge, but a centrifig! Everybody was laughing like drains and making all sorts of wisecracks, like "Get in, Ivanov! You don't have to pay!" and "It increases the g-load fivefold!"

These poets and physicists don't give you a moment's peace, even when you're asleep.

With this thought running through my brain I turned on the lot of them and began heaving them one by one over the fence round the

centrifig. All the time I was thinking: don't let me start dreaming about our form teacher. If I do, she'll stop me getting even with these Nonworgravys. Even in a dream, she would still stop me. Luckily I didn't dream about her. Only for some reason, when I grabbed him by the lapels, Maslov said in my father's voice "Still the same dream!" I was about to give Maslov a hefty swipe, when someone caught hold of my arm. And that someone was not in my dream, because when I looked round in my dream, I could feel someone holding me, but not see anyone. So then I woke up deliberately, to get even with the person who was restraining me. I opened my eyes and saw father. He was holding my arm not in a dream, so that I didn't get even with Maslov in my dream.

"Still the same dream," father said gently, letting go of my arm. "Look at that," he said to mother. "He not only fights when he is awake, but in his sleep as well."

"The Worgravy Yuri Ivanov controls all his actions only when awake. Now I must learn to control myself when I am asleep too," I said to justify myself.

"When you're asleep?" shouted father. "But you're awake..."

Then I had an absurdly simple, but I would say brilliant idea. "What if you could learn to be active when you are asleep and to sleep when you are active?" The prospects that this idea opened up nearly took my breath away. If only I could learn to do that! That way alone you could add another seventy-five years to your life! After all on average we spend seventy-five years awake and seventy-five years asleep! $75 + 75 = 150$. I tried to remember whether there was any living creature that worked when it was asleep and slept when it was working. This was an obvious "gap" in my encyclopaedic knowledge. There was anabiosis, of course. Anabiosis is a condition of the body in which the life processes are slowed down to such an extent that all visible signs of life are absent. Anabiosis is observed when there is a sudden deterioration in conditions of existence (low temperature or absence of humidity). When favourable conditions are restored organisms in a state of anabiosis resume their life processes.

No, anabiosis was an inactive state of the organism. But what if... What if you did not sleep in anabiosis? What if you moved, talked, walked around with your eyes open, studied and did all sorts of things, but all the time you were asleep. It would be a state in which you worked and rested at the same time, used up and replenished energy at the same time. Something like a perpetual motion machine! I got so ex... excited,

(in perfect composure, of course) that I even imagined what the press conference would be like.

Someone, somewhere, some time would get together a crowd of Soviet and foreign journalists, not any old where, even, but at a chess club. The hall would be full of grand masters and the like, as well as journalists, of course. The person in charge of the press conference would call for complete silence in the hall. At the table sit I, representatives of various sports organisations and a well-known doctor. The person in charge invites those present to ask me questions. How I took up sport, for example. I reply that I took up sport as a child. I got keen on all sorts of sport, including chess.

"We know you must have played many grand masters," somebody says.

"Not only grand masters," I reply. "Even among the lesser known practitioners of the art of chess-playing there are some very interesting people."

"Have you ever played your friends?"

"I have too much respect for them, to insist on a game with them," I reply. "And I don't wish to take advantage of their kindness."

Then I would be asked all sorts of questions about different things. And when the curiosity of those present was satisfied, the person in charge would say: "And now a chess session will take place. The Coconin, Super-X and Worgravy Yuri Ivanov challenges anyone to a match."

Then some grand master or other would come onto the platform and I would play a game with him. And perhaps even win, in fact most probably. Then the person in charge would ask for silence in the hall and make the following extraordinary announcement: "Dear comrades," he would say, addressing the audience. "The fact that Yuri Evgenievich Ivanov has won or, say, even lost this game would not appear to be particularly surprising, but actually there is something surprising about it, for Yuri Ivanov played the whole game in his sleep."

Pandemonium would break out in the hall and everyone would shout: "What do you mean: in his sleep? Why in his sleep? He's not asleep! He's talking, joking, laughing and even playing chess!"

Then the person in charge would say again: "The whole point is that, although he is talking, joking and playing, Yuri Ivanov, Yuri Evgenievich Ivanov, is actually asleep, a fact that will now be confirmed by the professor who is with us."

A silver-haired professor would confirm that according to my pulse rate and breathing I was asleep, and everyone would be quite astounded. Then the person in charge would say that this was a new and incredible discovery made by the Coconin, Super-X and Worgravy Yuri Evgenievich Ivanov, namely, that a sleeping person can be active, and an active person can sleep without wasting a minute.

At this point Ivanov's memoirs break off. Then he begins to describe the following morning...

Memoir Eleven

GREEN LINES

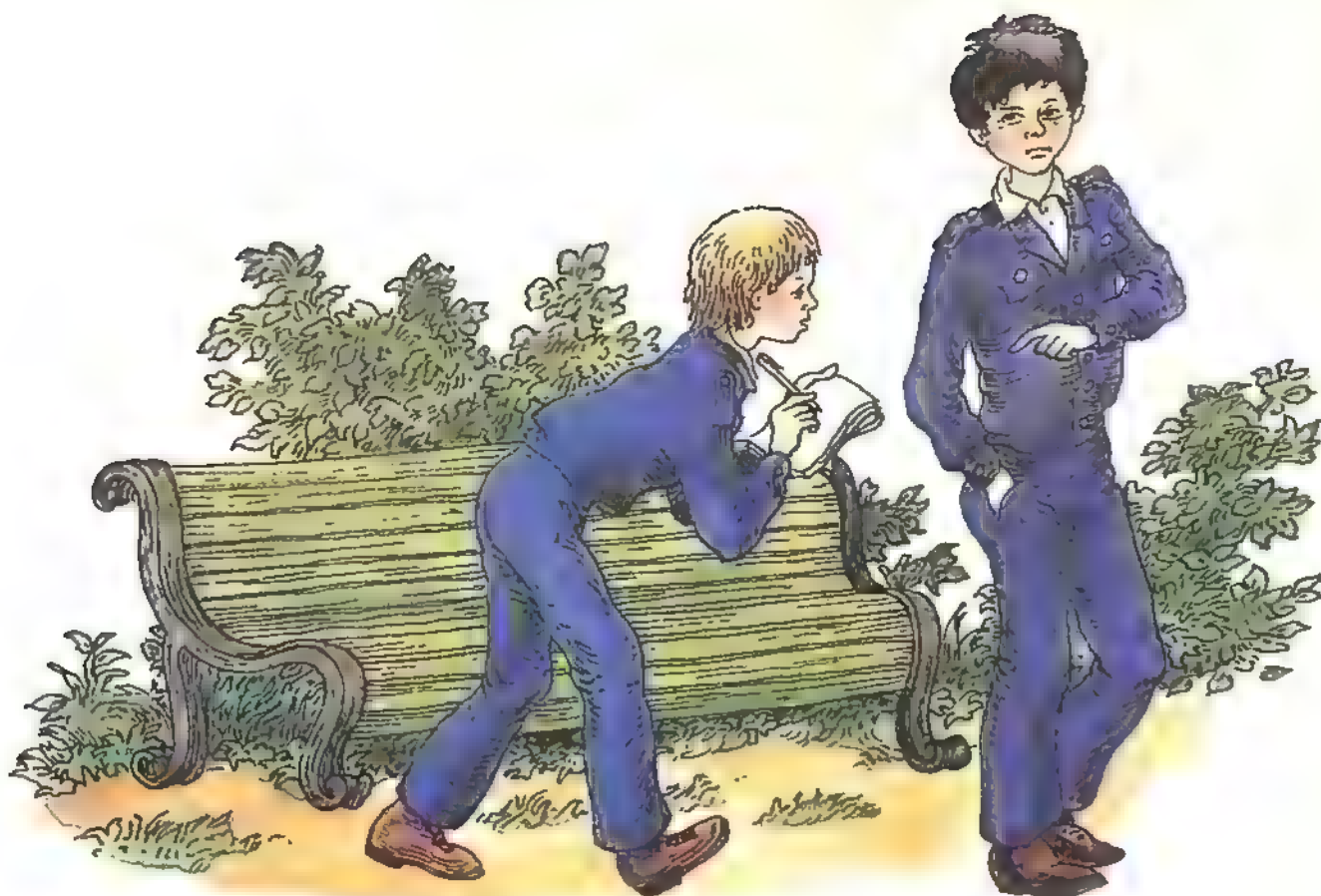
The first thing I thought when I woke up was how to teach those wretched spies a lesson. I decided to do it that very morning after exercises and breakfast. I went onto the balcony in the bright morning light, because I heard a suspicious noise outside. "'Tis better to see once, than hear a thousand times", as the saying goes. But what can we do if our eyes can't see everything? Take light, for example (the most obscure area in physics, scientists believe). Visible light is electro-magnetic radiation that we can sense. This radiation is produced by waves the length of which lies within a certain range. But as soon as a wave "crosses" the boundary to the right or left, it becomes invisible. We cannot see the infra-red and ultra-violet areas of the optical spectrum. But I went out into the visible part of light, as you can imagine, and what did I see? Wryneck staring straight at me through a pair of binoculars.

"Big things are seen at a distance!" he said to me instead of "hello". "That's what Yesenin said," he added by way of explanation.

"Big things are *also* seen at a distance. That's what Ivanov said," I corrected Kolesnikov-Wryneck and Yesenin.

I consciously drew myself erect and monitored myself. All the analysatory systems of my organism were functioning perfectly. The carbonate salt crystals were pressing on the membrane of my ear, signalling the ideal state of my hearing. I could hear everything that was happening around, above and beneath me perfectly.

Beneath me, Maslov's gang was hanging around by the entrance to the house, talking loudly about something.



"All alike beyond belief, led by Chernomor, their chief!" explained Wryneck, nodding in Maslov's direction.

But I said:

"Green actors—green lines!" It seemed to me that something like this had happened in my life before.

Someone had stood like that, demanding something of me and I had argued with them... Or had I read it in a book? And did it matter anyway who, where and what it was? Don't be distracted, Ivanov. Don't be distracted from the perigee you are about to show your class-mates. They want to get into your apogee, but it's still too early for them to do that. In fact an apogee is the farthest that a super-cosmonaut gets from Earth. My apogee, that is, when I carry out the most difficult mission in the world that has been entrusted to me, and a perigee is the nearest that a super-cosmonaut gets to Earth. That is in general, but in this particular case my perigee is the nearest that I get to my earthly affairs and

concerns. And today, in an hour's time, say, I shall begin to raise the curtain, as they say, and allow them to take a peep through the crack in the fence that surrounds my life, as it were. Allow these poor souls who are burning with curiosity, well, not burning, but, to be more precise, smouldering! Kolesnikov-Wryneck could not take his imploring eyes off me. He was trying hard not to blink in case he missed anything. There were even tears in his eyes from staring.

"In an hour or two's time some of us will be no longer," I said thoughtfully.

"Alive?" he enquired eagerly.

My statement immediately reminded him of an anthology of strange happenings. He waited for me to reply and politely repeated his question.

"Some of us will be no longer alive?"

"Only just alive," I explained. "Count everybody up by the numerical system!" I ordered Wryneck.

"Oh, you are an interesting person," said Wryneck, as I thought, with unfeigned admiration. "What an interesting fellow you are, Ivanov! There's the circus, the cinema, television and the theatre, but you're everything rolled into one."

"Now listen, Wryneck, don't just bandy words around like that. You go and record that I'm an interesting person and that I'm everything rolled into one. Record it and show it to my father."

"And mother?" asked Wryneck.

"No, not mother. She knows that I'm interesting without you telling her, and that I'm everything rolled into one."

"Okay," said Wryneck.

"Not 'okay'," I corrected him. "'Yes, sir.'"

"Yes, sir," said Wryneck obediently.

"And there's something else. Since we've got an anthology of strange happenings," I said, *thinking to myself* that it was right and proper that I was already *writing my own memoirs*, but it would be even better if someone else wrote them, say the self-same Kolesnikov-Wryneck. I also thought that Wryneck with his mediocre mind would not realise what was happening in the park before his very eyes, which was why I said:

"With your detective's mind you won't realise or understand what is about to happen, Wryneck, so I'll explain it to you in advance. And write this down too, by the way. I am about to go outside and run to the park, where the amusements are, see?"

Wryneck nodded his head to indicate that he had understood.

"The only person who will keep up with me all the way to the park is Maslov. The rest won't be able to stand the pace, and will fall behind. So don't think that Ivanov has gone off somewhere and don't go hunting all over the park for nothing. I'll tell you where Maslov and I will be."

"Should I write that down too?"

"Yes, write that down too," I said. "Now, there are all sorts of amusements in the park: there's the Trabant, the Mixer, the Fun Train, and the Flying Bowls. And then there's the bumper cars, the swings, the merry-go-round, the Musical Express, the Twister and the double-row merry-go-round, Rocketoplane 1 and Rocketoplane 2, and the Death Loop. I'll spend most of my time on the amusements that have a warning notice saying: Not recommended for people suffering from vertigo, cardiac and other ailments. So that's exactly what will happen, see?"

"Fifty-fifty as the Americans say," replied Kolesnikov-Wryneck using his smattering of English. "Oh, you are an interesting fellow, Ivanov. On the one hand, you can be understood, but on the other, you're a deep one and no mistake... Everything about you is a mystery."

"Okay," I said to Wryneck. "Time alone will help you to get the hang of me!" So saying I went down into the courtyard.

At the sight of me all my class-mates grew tense.

"Not so long ago," I said, "an English submarine *Pisces 3* sank with two research scientists on board. At a depth of 1,575 feet (approximately 473 metres) the stern of the *Pisces 3* hit the bottom—the impact was not as strong as they had expected—and the boat sank down twenty or thirty centimeters into the slime. After waiting a few minutes the scientists inspected the inside of the boat with the help of a torch: there was no sign of damage.

"Chapman informed base of the results of their inspection. 'Relax,' said Henderson, in charge of the operation, as calmly as if he were ordering lunch. 'Keep the atmospheric pressure steady. Don't move any more than you need. We'll come down and get you as soon as another *Pisces* arrives.' The advice 'don't move' was most important, for the oxygen supply which was supposed to last seventy-two hours (of which nine had already passed), could be 'stretched'. If the 'prisoners of the sea' remained calm and physically passive, far less oxygen would be used up. See? So save your oxygen. Don't be tense. Relax. Kutyrev, you're very tense. Relax your legs first, then your arms. Look how I'm standing. See how my arms are hanging loosely by my sides. My left leg is slightly to one

side, and my right one is not tense either, although my weight is on it."

My class-mates began to move their arms and legs about, trying to follow my sensible advice.

"All that is instead of 'hello'," I continued. "And instead of 'how are things' I'll tell you this: the volume of the body of the largest ant is measured in cubic millimetres, whereas the volume of an ant-hill together with its subterranean section—an incredible creation with labyrinths of intricate passages and chambers, incidentally—is hundreds of thousands of times larger than its 'builder'. If we compare the size of all the structures in a large ant colony with one of its inhabitants, the relative size of the ant-hill is more than eighty times bigger than the Great Pyramid. So, on the one hand, ants are teeny weeny things, but on the other, what?"

There was a tense silence.

"So on the other hand what?" I asked them all again.

"On the other hand 'Am I or am I not the king?'" said Vera Danilova, plucking up her courage.

"Right, Danilova," I said approvingly. "Only 'Am I or am I not the king' of what?" I asked Vera Danilova and all the others, supplying the answer myself: "Am I or am I not the king of nature? No, I am not the king! Not yet!" And I said the words "not yet" in two senses at once: in the sense that man is not yet the king of nature and in the sense of "cheerio" which the word also means in Russian. See? "But now," I continued, "let us give our muscular system a bit of brisk exercise. I'll issue the orders: quick march, at the run and walking pace! You'll obviously think this is another of Ivanov's weird commands. But in fact there's nothing strange about it at all. Allow me to explain: what is at the run for all of you, is walking pace for Ivanov. So, quick march at the run and walking pace."

And off I ran along the streets of Moscow towards the Gorky Central Park of Culture and Rest.

Memoir Twelve

I ACT MYSELF

"At first they'll all follow me on the amusements," I thought as I ran. "Then there will be fewer and fewer customers for each new amusement, and I'll keep going on them and having fun until Maslov can't take anymore

either and withdraws from the field, as they say. But I shall still keep on having fun. And when I've had enough of the amusements, I'll go to the Sandunovsky Steam Baths. Some of the boys will probably tag along after me, but none of them will go into the steam room with me, except Maslov perhaps. I'll have a steam, then a swim in the pool, then another steam and another swim in the pool. Then I'll rest for a bit and go to school. Our class is on the second shift, but they say next year we'll have all our lessons on the first shift."

This is followed by some scraps of sentences. In Gorky Park everything went as Yuri Ivanov had predicted: all the boys started "having fun" with him on the amusements, but he finished these endurance tests in splendid isolation. Even the future cosmonaut Maslov could not stand the pace set by Ivanov.

After having a go on all the amusements, Yuri set off for the Sandunovsky Steam Baths. Maslov alone managed to stagger there with him, but what took place in the baths is not clear because three or four pages of the text are missing. Then Ivanov goes on to describe how he sat in the school hall, waiting for lessons to begin and doing five things at a time...

After the visit to Gorky Park and the Sandunovsky Steam Baths, I sat in the school hall as if nothing had happened doing five things at once, the most serious of which was thinking about a book called *The Orator's Art*. I had bought it in a bookshop on the way to school. I had also bought another book called *Speeches in the Law Courts*. From *The Orator's Art* I proposed to learn the art of oratory, and from the speeches of counsel for the prosecution I was going to develop eloquence. I read the two books in forty minutes sitting on a bench in a square. I have recently mastered the art of so-called speed reading, and using this system I can now read about two or three hundred pages an hour. So sitting in school, I did not need to read the books, but was simply thinking over what I had read.

The point is that, as the representative of terrestrial civilisation I shall have to represent it at any encounter with beings from another planet, and in order to communicate with them I must, of course, be able to speak very eloquently and persuasively. It's as easy as pie for me to impress my fellow-countrymen with anything that comes to mind, of course, and without any eloquence, but fellow-countrymen are one thing

and beings from a different planet are quite another! The latter require a more scientific approach, I imagine.

From what I had read I realised that the art of oratory is based on philosophy, logic, psychology, ethics and linguistics... My thoughts were interrupted by Boris Kuttyrev who entered the hall. I looked at him and thought that I knew the basis of eloquence, but had no idea what was the basis of Boris Kuttyrev. He hadn't been able to take it in the park and had dropped out at the third or fourth go, I think, and now he looked pale and green about the gills, with sunken cheeks and a dazed expression in his eyes. He glanced at my book, flopped down weakly onto a chair and asked:

"Can you still read?"

"Yes," I said.

"And are you going to lessons?"

"Yes," I said.

Kuttyrev shrugged his shoulders and said:

"Well, Ivanov, I've seen some pretty tough frequenters of fair-grounds and amusement lovers, but this is the first time I've met anyone like you..." Then he glanced at the books I was reading and shuddered. The book on top was *Speeches in the Law Courts*.

"Comrade judges! In delivering the speech for the prosecution at this trial I am fully aware of its importance!" I shouted loudly. This was to check what my voice sounded like in terms of eloquence. It sounded splendid, really splendid.

Kuttyrev shuddered and looked at me with horror. His eyes said quite clearly: he hasn't "fallen in love", or "got into bad company" or been "stung by an insect" or "replaced by a being from another planet". It's obviously all those things together. He's fallen in love, got into bad company, been stung by an insect and replaced by a being from another planet! After thinking these thoughts, Kuttyrev asked quietly and weakly:

"Where is everyone?"

"Do you want to know where all the cry-babies have gone?" I asked Kuttyrev and then said angrily: "I'd like to throw them to the piranhas ... at low water."

"Yes," said Kuttyrev. "If you had your way, you'd do nothing but stand on the river bank throwing everyone to the piranhas. But what would you do when there was no one left?"

I naturally responded with the most contemptuous silence to the terrible

picture that Kuttyrev had drawn. If I had begun to reply, it would have meant declassifying one secret after another. I could not afford to do that, so I was obliged to listen to Kuttyrev in complete composure, without twitching a single super-muscle on my super-face. Not getting a reply, Kuttyrev sighed deeply and looked round.

"Where is everyone?" he asked again, tired but persistent.

"If I'm here, that means everyone's here," I said. "I think the others are in the sick room."

Kuttyrev sighed deeply again, evidently thinking that he should go to the sick room too, but he didn't have the strength to get up from his chair, so he stayed where he was. What is more, as I had already sensed, some important piece of business brought him to me. I looked at Kuttyrev pityingly and thought: "This is only my perigee, not even that, only the beginning of my perigee."

Kuttyrev evidently guessed what I was thinking, for he sighed again and said:

"They drove the horse..."

He couldn't even say the proverb to the end.

"They drove the hearse," I corrected him.

I left my pulse and blood pressure, checked my appetite—it was really wolfish—and thought: "Everything's in perfect working order. Super-cosmonaut Yuri Ivanov is feeling fine!"

I was about to immerse myself once more in my study of the art of oratory and eloquence, when Kuttyrev again distracted me.

"Listen, Ivanov," he said in a kind of flat way, without the picturesque epithets of which he is usually so fond. "Me and a group of friends have decided to call our amateur film club the Happy Shooting-Range. You know there's something called photo-hunting, when people shoot animals with cameras instead of guns. Well, we've decided to shoot live targets too, only with a cine camera. What do you think about that?"

I realised what Kuttyrev was leading up to and guessed straightaway that they had again chosen me as the target for their cine-hunting. I wanted to tell Kuttyrev that they would be shooting one of their own lot, but I refrained, merely thought for a moment and said:

"Are you going to spend all your life doing what is last and least, Kuttyrev?"

"Why last and least?" he asked in surprise.

"Because, as you know," I explained, "all the humour, all the funny stories, the skits and spoofs, hoaxes and humbugs, are usually on the back page of magazines and newspapers, and since they're at the back they must be last and least."

"Well, you'll be working on the back page all your life, Ivanov, so you and I will be doing the same thing," Kutyrev answered.

"What makes you think I'll be working on the back page?" I asked Kutyrev.

"Well, where else?" he asked in surprise.

"Are you quite sure it won't be not even the front page, but the one before that?" I asked Kutyrev again.

"There aren't any before the front page," said Kutyrev. "Only in science fiction perhaps. But that's not the point."

"Precisely, Kutyrev. Keep to the point. What do you want?"

"We want to make a satirical film about you." So saying Kutyrev took a few type-written sheets of paper out of his briefcase.

"You must ask permission first, permission from Comrade Ivanov, see, before you start on your skits and spoofs," I snapped.

"Well, that's just what I'm talking to you about, like asking permission," Kutyrev tried to justify himself.

I squinted at the sheets in Kutyrev's hands, which were probably the satire on me, and asked sternly:

"And you didn't phrase it properly either. What you should have said was not 'we want to', but 'we've had the stupid idea of' or 'the kids and me have been cooking up this crazy plan!'."

Kutyrev considered my amendment and reluctantly agreed.

"Oh, alright," he said. "We've had a stupid idea, and we've been cooking up this crazy plan ... of making a satirical film about you, that is shooting you with a camera."

"What sort of satirical film?" I asked sharply.

"Oh, just a small sketch from your past life and future entitled 'The Bell for Break, or What Would Happen if Yuri Ivanov Were Elected Class Prefect.'"

"Show me the script!" I ordered.

Kutyrev readily handed the sheets of paper to me.

In order to avoid any possible distortion of what I read, comrades of posterity, I shall now insert the text composed by Boris Kutyrev and then continue my memoirs.

THE BELL FOR BREAK, OR WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF
YURI IVANOV WERE ELECTED CLASS PREFECT

Singing "When I was a post-station coachman..." off key, Yuri Ivanov is sweeping the stage in front of the curtain. Misha Holin runs in.

M i s h a. That's enough sweeping, Ivanov, we're not having the first lesson.

Y u r i. What are we having instead?

M i s h a. We're going to elect the class prefect.

Y u r i. I do like the way you do your hair, Misha. Perhaps I'll do mine like that too...

Yuri and Misha disappear behind the curtain. Noises come across the loudspeaker front stage. Voice: "I propose that we elect Yuri Ivanov class prefect. He studies well, his behaviour is good, and he's modest, hard-working and, generally speaking, a good boy. Who's in favour? Please raise your hands! Unanimous! It's up to you now, Ivanov.

Congratulations!"

More noise

The curtain rises

M i s h a. You can all go!

K o l y a. Except those who are in the concert. Let's decide on the programme and do a bit more rehearsing.

M a s h a. I think we should ask Ivanov about the programme. He's class prefect now, so it concerns him too...

Z o y a. Yes, that's right.

K o l y a. I agree. Come here, Yuri Ivanov.

Y u r i. I am here. What is it?

K o l y a. Yuri, this evening our drama group is putting on a concert.

Y u r i. So what?

M i s h a. Everyone in the concert has thought up a programme, but we don't know which one is best. So we've decided to ask you. What do you think it's best to start with? Masha suggests a poem and Zoya says a song.

Y u r i. What's the point in asking me? The concert doesn't concern me.

K o l y a. What do you mean? You're class prefect. Our leader. So get on with it. Everything concerns you now. Should we start with a poem or a song?

Y u r i. I haven't studied at the Conservatory, everyone, and I can't sing for toffee. A bear trod on my ear when I was a baby... Anyway I'm just an ordinary schoolboy...

K o l y a. You may have been an ordinary schoolboy, Yuri, but you are class prefect now, and you've already got some experience of being in charge of us...

Y u r i. What experience? I've only been prefect for five minutes...

S e r i o z h a. Only five minutes! You mean a whole five minutes.

M a s h a. We don't even have one minute's experience...

S e r i o z h a. See? That's why the class already respects you and esteems your judgment.

Y u r i. Respects me and esteems my judgment, did you say?

S e r i o z h a. Very much indeed.

Y u r i. And everything concerns me?

M i s h a. Everything must concern the class prefect.

K o l y a. They take notice of you. What's more, they value your opinion.

Y u r i (*gravely*). Well said, Kolya. Very well said. People take notice of me. They value my opinion.

V a d i m. After all, you are very clever.

Y u r i. That's true. I am very clever.

L e n a. And you have got good taste, Yuri.

Y u r i. I can't deny that... Anyone else want to say anything?

K o l y a. You've got a very keen eye and a lucky hand. That's why the class has esteemed you for five minutes now.

Y u r i (*looks at his watch*). Five minutes and forty seconds! Please be more precise.

M i s h a. I'll tell you something else, Yuri. Our class already loves you! Yes, they love you and they're very proud of you...

Y u r i. Stop, stop! Say that again. They what me?

K o l y a. They love you.

Y u r i. And they're what of me?

K o l y a. They're very proud of you.

Y u r i. But why?

M i s h a. Because you're a very ... er... What is it...

Y u r i (*prompting him*). I am a very striking individual. And as prefect of 7a I'm what?

K o l y a. As prefect of 7a you're a real ... thingumagig...

Y u r i (*prompting him*). Sensation!

M i s h a. That's right. A sensation.

Y u r i. I'm a personality!

K o l y a. I should say so! If you weren't, they wouldn't have chosen you...

Y u r i. I don't object...

K o l y a. That's why we've decided to ask your advice, to plan the concert programme together...

Y u r i. Together? Alright, let's try to do it together. We'll see what happens. (*He paces the stage very significantly.*) Now, tell me together. What's it all about?

S e r i o z h a. Oh, no! We've been explaining to you for the last twenty minutes. Here are the programmes. We don't know which one to choose.

Y u r i. Kindly show a little more respect if you please. You and I have never sat at the same desk. So I'd like you not to be quite so familiar.

S e r i o z h a. Of course. But I did sit at the same desk with you for six years, Yuri, I mean, sir.

Y u r i. So you did, but you won't any more. Trifonov, Vorobiev!

V o i c e s. Here we are!

Y u r i. Get a saw from the store-keeper and saw this off.

V o i c e s. Saw what off?

Y u r i. My half of the desk from his...

V o i c e s. Yes, but...

Y u r i. No buts. Get on with it!

Trifonov and Vorobiev run off.

(*He puts a chair on the desk, climbs up and sits down on the chair.*) Do it together, eh? No more togethers, understand? I've risen high enough in your estimation to decide anything affecting our class on my own. After all the class prefect is a very special person, not just an ordinary pupil... (*Reads the programmes and tears them up.*) Rubbish... Nonsense... Primitive... I'll draw you up a programme now...

K o l y a. Alright, Yuri, you do that. Only let me give you a piece of advice.

Y u r i. Who do you think you are, advising me?

K o l y a. I'm your class-mate from 7a.

Y u r i. That's right... My class-mate from 7a, not my adviser! I don't need any advice! Got it? You yourselves said that I had good taste and I was clever...

M i s h a. I said one head is fine...

Y u r i. So you did. And that's enough.

M i s h a. Let me finish. I said: one head is fine, but two...

Yuri. Who has two? Surely not you? Fancy yourself as a great thinker, do you? A second Spinoza? And I don't like your hair-cut. Call that a hair-cut?

Misha. You liked it before.

Yuri. I might have liked it before, but now I might like it or I might not, I might like it or...

Misha. Actually my hair-cut has got nothing to do with you.

Yuri. Wait a minute. You said that everything concerned me, did you not?

Misha. Yes, we did, but...

Yuri. No buts... Anyone with anything to say, put up his or her hand.

They all put up their hands.

(Condescendingly.) Go ahead, Kolya.

Kolya. Well I never, what a nerve! We can get along without your advice, you know. You're prefect of our class, not the drama group, and you haven't got a degree in music...

Yuri. Who hasn't got a degree in music? I haven't? That's a laugh. Didn't you know that I studied at the Moscow Conservatory?

Misha. When did you manage to do that?

Yuri. When I was a child prodigy. From two to five ... the department of singing.

Kolya. But you said a bear stepped on your ear when you were little.

Yuri. A bear stepped on my ear? No, I stepped on his! On his ear! See?

Zoya. What is the matter with him? Did we over-praise him?

Masha. I think that's the bell.

Zoya. What bell?

Masha. For the first break. Just look how he's changed since the first bell. We elected him prefect, and this is what he does.

Yuri *(writing and muttering to himself)*. I'm not passing any of your acts. I'll make up some new ones myself...

Kolya. And we won't pass your acts! Get down from there! He's only been prefect for ten minutes and look at the mess he's made of it. Get him down, everyone! He needs to come down to earth for a bit.

The boys and girls lift down the chair on which
Yuri Ivanov is sitting.

Misha. And he made a soft landing in the launching area. (*Hands Ivanov the broom.*) Here, take that. When you've swept up the rubbish come to the class-room for the new elections.

Yuri (*quietly and politely*). But what about my advice, everyone? You wanted to discuss something with me ... together, you said...

Misha. Thanks, Yuri, but I think we can manage without your advice.

Kolya. May we live to a hundred and two without a prefect who's like you...

Yuri. So it's all over?

The boys and girls (*in unison*). Yes, it's all over! (*They disappear behind the curtain.*)

Yuri (*holding Misha back*). You have got a nice hair-cut, I keep thinking perhaps I'll do my hair like that too.

Kolya. Well, you just keep on thinking. By the way, Ivanoy, congratulations on setting up a record.

Yuri. What record?

Misha. An All-Union record. You were class prefect for ten minutes and eight seconds.

Yuri (*looks at his watch*). Excuse me, but it's ten minutes and ten seconds. You must be more precise...

Misha. Never mind. It's still a record! (*Goes off.*)

Left alone Yuri Ivanov picks up the broom and sweeps the floor, singing "When I was a post-station coachman..." off key.

While I was casting an eye over the opus you have just read, Kutyrev, probably to avoid any possible unpleasantness, moved away and stood by the door.

"Who's going to act me?" I asked threateningly.

"Maslov..." Kutyrev stuttered.

"It's not on!" I cut him short.

"No one could act you better than Maslov."

"There is someone who could," I replied enigmatically with a pensive shake of the head.

QUICK MARCH TO THE HEADMASTER!

Kutyrev was so surprised by my suggestion that he stood there for ages without saying a word, unable to believe his ears, and only when I confirmed my intention once more, did he ask me in a stunned voice:

"Hey, Ivanov. Can you give yourself permission to be shot in a film in which you act yourself?"

"Why shouldn't I? I'll allow myself, but no one else. I'm the only person who can give myself permission. Nobody else can," I announced.

"Then here are your lines. Learn them."

I took the script out of Kutyrev's hands. What script? Between ourselves, it was pure fake, nothing like my past or future life. But there was one thing about it that interested me: firstly, when I'd finished filming myself, I could then with Kutyrev's help film the scene with father that I had to turn into a film, and, secondly, I thought it would be interesting to compare my two lives, the real life that I led, and the life that my fellow-countrymen imagined I led. But what about the script? That didn't matter... The script could be changed later. I mean the narrator's text. I informed Kutyrev, still goggling at me in amazement, to this effect.

"The script will have to be changed, of course," I said.

"In what way?" Kutyrev asked anxiously.

"Not now," I reassured him. "Some time later. You must understand that out of your concoction only two words bear the slightest relation to me, and that very remote."

"What two words?" said Kutyrev in an injured voice. "Why only two? All the words here relate to you. I didn't concoct them. I wrote them in a moment of inspiration. And you do behave disgustingly and sing off key. And you cut singing lessons..."

"Have you ever bothered to ask yourself why I don't go in for singing? And if I tried to sing in singing lessons and sang off key, why do you imagine that was? Have you ever bothered to think about that?" I asked Kutyrev.

"Well, it's probably because a bear stepped on your ear when you were little," Kutyrev suggested.

"A bear stepped on me? On my ear?" I asked menacingly. I decided to take the offensive. "A bear stepped on me indeed! It was me who stepped on a bear's ear one day when I was walking through the forest!"

"That's just like you," Kutyrev conceded.

"But actually you must admit that's not a snipe from the cine-gun, is it? Can't you see for yourself, Kutyrev?"

"Unfortunately we know next to nothing about you." Kutyrev tried to justify himself. "Where you studied or how you studied. But you weren't always such a dreadful smart aleck and big-headed know-all as you are now. Actually we have set up a committee to investigate your, I don't want to say murky, so I'll just say obscure past."

"You've already set up a committee!" I exclaimed loudly with delight, but at that moment the bell went.

Kutyrev got up and said:

"Let's got to the lesson and do the filming tomorrow." Dragging himself exhaustedly to the door, he collided with Nina Kisina on the threshold.

"Ivanov! Where's Ivanov? Are you here, Ivanov? Oh, you are here, Ivanov! Quick march to the headmaster! Make it snappy!" she ordered.

Memoir Fourteen

THE HYPNOSIS SESSION

When I went to reconnoitre in the dining room, mother was sitting in front of the mirror doing something to her face. Then I went into father's room. He was sitting in an armchair reading a book. I went up and glanced over his shoulder to see what he was reading. It was a medical book. About unbalanced behaviour in the nervy adolescent. I bent down and read the title "Nervous diseases" on the cover. So father really had decided to try and diagnose something wrong with me. With me! Never mind! I would get even at my press conference. I'd tell everything.

"I hope your schedule will allow you to spend some time at home this evening, will it?" father asked me. "Any minute now I'm expecting Uncle Petya and ... the others," he added in a somewhat uncertain voice.

"There's a school concert this evening," I said. "It's essential that I should be there."

"That's something new," said father. "Yuri Ivanov at a school concert."

It was something new, there was no getting away from it. I had never had any spare time for going to school concerts before, of course, but the notice in the school announcing a dress rehearsal had attracted my attention mainly because of these words: "The blind space flight, a farce." What's all that about "blind" and "space", then "flight" and "farce"?

I pondered, involuntarily frowning with my already frowning face.

"We'll see," I thought then by the notice. "We'll see who and what they're making fun of and, most important, who's making it. A farce here and a medical consultation there, but my schedule is full of training exercises. There isn't enough time! Where can I get another twenty-four hours from? That's out of the questions, of course, but say twelve or thirteen? Or even five or six," I thought, placing my marks-book boldly on the table in front of my father.

"There's only one solution," I continued my reflections. "I'll have to sleep when I'm not supposed to be sleeping, and not sleep when I'm supposed to. Nature must have patented some invention like that for animals, or at least birds or insects. Man must discover it, unravel it and equip himself with it..."

Father had still not picked up the marks-book. I moved it a little closer to him. Father shuddered, hunched up in a funny way and even, I thought, moved back a bit from the marks-book with the chair on which he was sitting. He was, in fact, right to behave like this in relation to the marks-book. The fact is that on that day, an historic one for me and everyone else, I had been summoned to the headmaster twice: before the lesson and during the lesson itself, when it transpired that the amusement I had provided for the class in the park of culture and rest had not been without consequences for both them and me. Practically the whole class had missed the lesson. And it was to this that the entry written in the headmaster's hand in my marks-book referred: "Lured away the whole class and took them for rides on the amusements until they were in such a state that hardly anyone attended lessons." I liked the "hardly anyone". I had come to school as right as rain...

I stood by father for a while, then went back to my room to rehearse my part in the film that Boris Kutyrev was going to make called "The Bell for Break, or What Would Happen if Yuri Ivanov Were Made Class Prefect." I put a special device on my shoulders that enabled you to read a book while walking round the room on your hands. After donning this shoulder lectern, I fixed my part to it and began walking around the room on my hands, rehearsing my lines.

So KOLYA says to me: "Well, Yuri, you may have been an ordinary schoolboy, but now you are class prefect, and you've already had some experience of being in charge of us."

M e. What experience? I've only been prefect for five minutes...

Seriozha. Only five minutes! You mean a whole five minutes. That's why the class already respects you and esteems your judgment.

Me. Already esteems my judgment, did you say?

Seriozha. Very much indeed.

Me. And everything concerns me?

Misha. Everything must concern the class prefect.

Kolya. They take notice of you. What's more, they value your opinion.

Vadim. After all, you are very clever.

Me. That's true. I am very clever.

Father entered the room, evidently attracted by the sound of my voice. I continued to walk about on my hands and said:

Me (*gravely*). Well said, Kolya. Very well said. People already take notice of me. They already value my opinion.

Vadim. After all, you are very clever.

Me. That's true. I am very clever.

"What are you doing?" Father interrupted my rehearsing, approaching me cautiously.

"What am I doing? Learning a part," I explained, walking away from father on my hands.

"What part?" father asked me.

"They're making a film about me in class," I explained again.

"A film about my son?" father asked himself. "That's interesting. Show me your part."

I padded up to father on my hands, balanced on my left hand, and gave him the script with my right. Father read the title out loud and said:

"What really would happen if Yuri Ivanov were elected class prefect?"

He took the script in both hands and began to read with interest and, I should say, considerable curiosity.

"You see," said father apparently to himself. "They're filming a satire on him with him acting the main role himself. Acting himself. It's incredible!" With these words he left the room.

I got to my feet again and said:

"Everything will be as I want it in about twenty-five years time. Can't you be patient for a bit?"

"But if everything goes on like it is now at home, I won't live another twenty-five years," said father from the dining room.

This was pure sentimentality, and I had no right to react to it. At that moment there was a ring at the door.

"One of the uncles has arrived," I thought and went onto the balcony because my schedule said I was due to relax.

On the neighbouring balcony in a deck-chair lounged Kolesnikov scribbling away very quickly in a thick notebook. I coughed so he would not think that I was spying on him instead of just looking around. Kolesnikov-Wryneck stopped writing immediately and gave a broad, I would have said somewhat stupid, grin.

"There," he said. "I'm just finishing some memoirs about you."

So saying he got another thick notebook out of the cupboard on the balcony. Even then I immediately thought: "Hasn't he got rather a lot of memoirs about the episode in the park? It was only a small incident in my life, yet it takes up two whole notebooks!" But I didn't say anything of the sort. I was interested to see what it seemed like to someone else.

On the first page written in Kolesnikov's fair hand were the words: "On that memorable, historic morning Yuri Ivanov came out onto his balcony that is next to mine."

"What do you think of it?" Kolesnikov asked me, before I had time to read any more than a few lines.

"Alright," I said. "The worse, the better! The heavier, the lighter. The more complicated, the simpler!"

"Yes, I see," said Kolesnikov, who had evidently got used to my somewhat cryptically expressed ideas. "I just wanted to know what you think of them, my memoirs?" he asked me again.

I began reading them aloud.

"Kolesnikov, his memoirs about me." So that he realised what it was all about I added: "Just a moment. I'll feed you your memoirs." Then I turned over the page and began to read on.

"Not bad, eh, Ivanov?" Kolesnikov glowed with pride at his work.

"That's just what worries me. It's too good for you. You couldn't write like that on your own. There's some sort of anthology of some sort of mysterious event here," I said and added: "Actually it's pretty good. You have managed to convey something of me, particularly in the words: 'He is splendidly built with a fine, noble profile. Laconic, austere, take a good look at this colossus and you will be "plagued" by a dual impression: for sometimes he seems to be tensed to the utmost under a great load and sometimes his powerful muscles ripple playfully with effortless ease. It is this alternation of states that creates the impression of struggle, of an Atlantis grappling with a burden invisible to our eyes...' Hmm.." I gave Kolesnikov an X-ray stare.

"Well..." Kolesnikov flushed, unable to meet my eyes. "Actually I did copy that from a magazine," he confessed.

"That doesn't matter if it expresses something essential about me, particularly as you have admitted it." I was not annoyed with Kolesnikov for this confession. "But what about this? What do you write later? You began more or less close to the truth, but later on, Kolesnikov, what about the way you describe my conversation with my class-mates in the yard and in the park! I've underlined odd words and expressions here. This is one of them: "'Take pity on your thermal power station, your TPS, for short, or your brain-box," Ivanov said to Maslov.' Now when did I ever say that to Maslov? Or: "'You don't give a damn about anyone, Ivanov," said Vera, looking Ivanov straight in the eye...' Now who would dare to say that to me and 'straight in the eye' as well? Or here you write that someone called me Chumputer! Who would have dared to call me that in my presence? I believe this is actually what you think about me and you are ascribing to other people... Or take this: "'You noisy nit," said Ivanov.' I did not say that. 'Do you savvy that or not?' What an expression! 'That Ivanov is always giving himself airs!' Well, at least that has something in it—'always' and 'giving'. But I can't remember anyone saying 'I see for the hundred and first time...' "'You'll soon see for the last time," said Ivanov.' "'Scram and make sure you get lost and I don't find you for a long time..." said Ivanov.' I did not say that! And, in general, Kolesnikov, I must tell you that if you write that sort of stuff now, if you heap that sort of trash, excuse the expression, on me now, what will you write about this historic episode in forty years' time? I could write anything I liked about myself, but could I allow myself to?" I asked.

"Are you writing something about yourself then?" Kolesnikov pricked up his ears.

"Whether I am or not is beside the point. The point is that you, Kolesnikov, don't know what memoirs are or how they are written. Or am I wrong?"

Kolesnikov agreed with me that he did not know what memoirs were or how they were written.

"Memoirs," I explained, "are literary notes that are the author's reminiscences, the accounts of eyewitnesses—see, eyewitnesses! About various events in private and public life. Some memoirs are valuable sources enabling us to reconstruct the circumstances surrounding major historical events. But how can your memoirs be a valuable source, if

you tell lies in them all the time! Take a notebook and rewrite everything as it really happened."

No sooner had I told Kolesnikov to go indoors and rewrite the whole of that botched up document, than there was a racket in the living room. I went back to my room, fixed my part as class prefect into the shoulder lectern, stood on my hands and was just about to start rehearsing, when into the room came father with Uncle Petya and a strange man.

"Hello, Yuri," said Uncle Petya, with a wave of his hand.

"Hello, Uncle Petya," I said with a wave of my foot.

"There, you see," father said to the guests in a pained voice. "He walks about all the time on his hands."

"Never mind," Uncle Petya reassured him. "I used to walk on my head at his age."

"Get up, when you're speaking to your elders," said father.

"But it's better talking upside-down," I parried.

"Why is it?" asked father, beginning to get angry.

"Well, for one reason more blood runs to your head, and blood..." I began heatedly. "And blood is..."

"Blood is a liquid that circulates in the circulatory system of animals and man and carries substances in the organism," the strange man broke in. "It is one of the types of internal tissue." The man stopped and asked: "Is that enough or shall I go on?"

I heard this lecture on blood standing on my two feet and wondering whether this was the man who was supposed to work out what made me tick and then drum the right ideas into me. What was his profession? Was he a doctor perhaps? He seemed to be very clued up on what blood was.

"Well, hello again, nephew," said Uncle Petya, slapping me on the back. "Let's go and make some fish soup. My fish soup is finger-licking good! So, listen, chaps," said Uncle Petya, addressing father and evidently continuing a conversation begun in the kitchen. "Fish are a good barometer. Sometimes they won't bite even in the most favourable weather. They just won't bite and that's that! No special bait or tasty morsels will help. Then when you're going home empty-handed, a fierce squall suddenly blows up or you get drenched to the skin by a heavy downpour from a black cloud that has appeared from nowhere, and once again you see how right the fishermen are in saying that fish are the best barometer! By not biting they warn you about bad weather long before it comes, see?"

And Uncle Petya went on at length about fishing. Whenever he came

to see us, he talked about nothing but fishing and I didn't like that about him. He was a chemist by profession and had graduated from the Lomonosov Institute of Chemical Technology, but he never talked about chemistry.

I interrupted him and said suddenly:

"By the way, Uncle Petya, about fish. Do you know there is a fish that suffocates in water?"

"There can't be!" Uncle Petya exclaimed.

"So you don't know everything about fish after all!" I said, pleased with myself. "There really is a fish that suffocates in water. It's called a periphtalmus or mudskipper. It's a strange creature with bulging eyes set close to each other, not more than five centimeters long, but it can skip over a metre. It's very good at catching insects on dry land."

"Surely it can't!" Uncle Petya exclaimed again.

But I said:

"Fish experts like you should be thrown to the piranhas ... at low water!"

Our conversation did not seem to be greatly to father's liking, because he interrupted Uncle Petya right at the beginning of the fishing story which he was about to tell again.

"That's enough about fishing. That wasn't why I asked you to come."

"Oh, yes!" Uncle Petya threw up his hands and was about to address me, when I looked at my watch and said:

"Listen, boys! I give you thirty minutes. I'm very busy. So keep it short! And snappy! And to the point! Starting now!"

I looked at my watch then at father, because he seemed to be having hysterics.

"Hear that! 'Boys!'" he said to Uncle Petya and his friend. "'Boys! How do you like that? And he's giving us thirty minutes of his precious time!'"

"It's not thirty now, it's twenty-nine," I said, which almost made father choke. It was a good thing Uncle Petya's friend tried to calm father by saying:

"Don't get worked up... I've already told you on the phone that among our adolescents, particularly the public-spirited ones, there are some whose main aim is to achieve something great for other people, their friends, their class, their parents, sometimes for the whole of mankind..."

At the words "the whole of mankind" I pricked up my ears.

"In one school I met a boy who was obsessed with the idea of reorganising not only his class, but the whole universe! The teenagers of today are an enterprising lot."

Hearing this from Uncle Petya's friend, I calmed down. I was a super-teenager and super-enterprising, so it didn't refer to me.

"Have you heard about the experiment with enterprising teenagers that was reported in the magazine *Knowledge Is Strength*?" I asked Uncle Petya's friend casually.

Uncle Petya's friend looked most surprised.

"Were you interested in that experiment?" he asked.

"Not particularly," I replied evasively. "I just glanced through an article entitled 'Did you ask me?'"

"And what did you think of it?"

"Not very much. But there was one good idea, remember? I quote: '...enterprising teenagers may simply be children with different dimensions, and they may be interested in super-important tasks that are invariably of use to someone: scientific or economic tasks that can change people's lives radically. In short, 'adult' rather than 'children's' aim'..."

I shot such a meaningful glance at father with my laser eyes that he even recoiled slightly.

"With different dimensions," I repeated. "And they may be interested in super-important tasks that are invariably of use to someone. In short, 'adult' rather than 'children's' aims. And I would add, perhaps even super-adult super-aims," I said significantly.

"Do you want to be a doctor then?" asked Uncle Petya's friend, somewhat dazed by this beginning to the conversation.

But Uncle Petya himself, who had understood nothing at all of my short but challenging skirmish with his friend, said:

"Don't you go flummoxing us adults with all your knowledge and strength! I don't know what young people are coming to these days. They know everything they shouldn't and nothing they should. You stick to the point: why is your father displeased with you? Are you studying badly or misbehaving?"

"Me studying badly?" I asked in surprise.

Father frowned and said:

"You've got it all mixed up, Petya. He's studying so well that they haven't got a high enough mark for him. He used to study badly, four years ago, but I can't even describe the way he's studying now. One teacher doesn't give him fives, which the best pupils usually get, but eights and nines! Once he even got a ten. Have you seen his marks-book? It's nothing but sixes and seven pluses. It's as if ... how can I put it? It's as if he already knows everything right up to the top class!"

"The top class?" exclaimed Uncle Petya in amazement.

"I'll have to make use of my secret weapon and show this medical council that I know far more than the top class," I thought. "It'll be more difficult with adults, of course, but there are no super-obstacles for a super-cosmonaut."

"Why only up to the top class, I know enough to get a degree too."

"To get a degree where?" asked Uncle Petya disbelievingly.

"Well, from your old institute, say, the Lomonosov Institute of Precision Chemical Technology. Here's Bilmeyer's textbook *An Introduction to the Chemistry and Technology of Polymers*." I handed a book with brown binding to Uncle Petya. "Open it at any page and ask me any question you like."

"Well, of all the nerve!" father exclaimed angrily.

But Uncle Petya said:

"Alright then." He laughed heartily and began leafing through the textbook, obviously trying to find a really difficult question for me. "So you know enough for the Institute of Precision Chemical Technology, do you?" he asked misbelievingly.

"By the way, father," I turned to him. "While Uncle Petya is finding a question for me, I'd like to take on your calculating machine. Get your calculator."

"What do you mean: take it on?" exclaimed father.

"I'll multiply any numbers in two seconds flat. Just give me two large two-digit numbers for a start!"

"I've never heard anything like it!" snapped father.

"Just give me two large two-digit numbers, then you can say if you've heard anything like it or not."

"See how he talks to his father and what he talks about!" father spluttered angrily, turning to Uncle Petya's friend.

Uncle Petya's friend gave me a reproachful look and shook his head, but advised father to name two large numbers.

"Must they be large?" asked father still in an angry voice.

"Preferably," I replied calmly.

"Well, alright, let's say ... eighty nine ... multiplied by ... ninety two."

"Eight thousand one hundred and eighty-eight!" I said without a moment's hesitation.

"How could you do it so quickly?" mumbled father in complete bewilderment.

Then he got up, went quickly to his room and returned with the calculator. He gave the lever a twist and then wrote down the total. Then he took a sheet of clean paper and began to multiply the two figures without the help of the machine. When father went to fetch the calculator, I said to Uncle Petya:

"Time's passing. Hurry up with your questions!"

"Alright, alright," said Uncle Petya, shaking his head in bewilderment.

"And would you ask me a question too, please?" I turned to Uncle Petya's friend. "So that I can answer you both at once. In fact you and Uncle Petya can ask me your questions at the same time."

"Since you're so interested in psychology, you might have read some articles on group relationships?" Uncle Petya's friend asked me.

"I not only 'might have', but have, of course, read articles on group interaction," I announced. "Actually I am against all interactions, particularly group ones! He who has to..." (I did not say the words "achieve much by himself"), "cannot waste time ... nor did I say "on group interactions", so the whole sentence sounded, as usual, rather cryptic: "He who has to ... cannot waste time...").

"Well, I think that group interaction is exactly what you need," said Uncle Petya's friend. "Then you wouldn't suffer from the thing I have noticed about you: you can't find proper reactions to your environment. You can't adapt properly to it, in other words. I don't mean adapt in the pejorative sense of the word. This inability of yours is a feature of your character: you were born that way, and that's how your life has developed... In short, you react wrongly to other people, and other people react wrongly to your reactions... Perhaps you think other people treat you as you deserve, but in fact they are quite justified: do as you would be done by."

"Here we are," said Uncle Petya, taking his head out of the textbook and joining in the conversation. "Now, tell me what friction is and what is the difference between plastication and plastification."

"Friction is a characteristic of rolling presses (rolling mixers) used for the manufacture and dyeing of polymer mixtures. Friction is the term used for the relationship of the peripheral speed of the front rolling press to the peripheral speed of the back rolling press. Is that clear?" I asked. "And now the difference between plastication and plastification. Plastication is the softening of the polymer mixture as a result of mixing at low heat. Plastification is the introduction of a plastificator into the polymer mixture."

"Do you intend to study at the Institute of Precision Chemical Technology then?" Uncle Petya's friend asked me.

"No, I don't," I replied.

"Hmm," said Uncle Petya's friend. "Then I'll try to convince you of the use of group relationships. I can see you have a very strong desire to lead, but leaders are not always good. Are they?"

"Not ordinary leaders!" I thought. "But super-leaders can't be bad, so I don't need to answer that one. Uncle Petya's friend hasn't guessed who I am. These adults can't think further than leaders. They can't even imagine that a super-leader might emerge from the ordinary leaders."

"To continue," said Uncle Petya's friend, "character difficulties often reveal themselves in a clash of contradictory inner tendencies, one of which the person does not want to admit to himself. When a teenager has an excessively high opinion of himself (compared with his real abilities and opportunities), his excessive demands cannot be satisfied, of course. This frustration damages the teenager's psyche and he finds it necessary to defend his excessively high opinion of himself. This in turn..."

"What this leads to is common knowledge," I interrupted him. "It leads to a phenomenon that psychologists call 'the inadequacy effect', a state in which a person's excited nervous system forces him to act irrespective of his environment. Have I understood you correctly?" I asked Uncle Petya's friend. Without giving him time to collect himself, I continued. "But did you know," I said, addressing all those present, "that a person's opinion of himself and the opinion that other people have of him, for example, the opinions of adults and other teenagers, very often differ considerably? For people see only what a person has done to date, but he may regard himself as a creator of both present and future. So the truth is usually somewhere in the middle: a person's merit lies not only in what he has already done, but in what he intends to do."

"It's right!" exclaimed father, who had been busy checking my answer. "I've checked it. But how did you do it so quickly?"

"It's very easy. You won't tell anyone, will you?"

"Of course not."

"How much is the first number, eighty-nine, less than a hundred?"

"Eleven."

"And the second?"

"Eight."

"It's not difficult to multiply eleven by eight, is it?"

"Of course not. Eighty-eight."

"That's the end of the answer."

"But how did you find the beginning?" father asked me.

"That's even easier," I replied. "It's not hard to subtract eight from eighty-nine, is it?"

"No."

"How much will it be?"

"Eighty-one."

"And that's the beginning of the answer. If you like you can subtract eleven from ninety-two, and that will make eighty-one as well."

"Hmm," said Uncle Petya's friend. "Do you intend to study at the Institute of Economics?"

"No, I don't," I said. "Now, you lot, let me ask you a question. Have you read the article 'How the brain takes a decision' by a medical expert? He writes: 'Among the numerous definitions of the essence of a living organism, I was particularly impressed by that of Academician A. I. Berg: "All animate objects differ from inanimate objects because they have needs. Let us note that a need is by no means simply hunger, thirst, or..."'"

"No, we haven't read it," Uncle Petya's friend admitted guiltily. "You can't find time to read everything, can you?" he sighed deeply.

"But you must find time," I said. "You must... Uncle Petya here finds time to work for the benefit of chemistry and ... go fishing. By the way, Uncle Petya, what are those kinetic curves you have in chemistry?"

Uncle Petya thought hard and said:

"Well, kinetic curves are curves..."

"And those kinetic straight lines you have in chemistry, are they straight lines?" I asked. "Let's try to remember what kinetic curves are."

"What are kinetic curves?" Uncle Petya repeated the question after me.

"No, I'm not asking you to repeat the question, but to tell us the answer."

"Kinetic curves..." said Uncle Petya and then stopped.

I helped him.

"Kinetic curves are curves of the dependence of vulcanizer properties on vulcanization time. How does it go on?"

Uncle Petya went on saying nothing.

"Well, you don't seem to know what kinetic curves are, Uncle Petya. Perhaps you know what polymer deformation is?"

Uncle Petya again kept quiet.

"Well," I said. "So you don't know what polymer deformation is either."

I realise that. But you did graduate from the Institute of Precision Chemical Technology and you should know what polymer deformation is."

"But I only deal with general economic aspects of chemistry in my job," said Uncle Petya, could it have been somewhat guiltily?

"Shall you and I have a talk about accounting, father?"

"God help us," said father, lifting up both hands in despair. "I give in! You can see how dreadful it is! He terrorises the whole lot of us with his knowledge. And he doesn't make anyone happy! Just plunges us all into despair. I, for one, am scared stiff of him! He's got a simply, simply ... ghastly natural ability for knowing everything on earth!" father yelled. "And he thinks this gives him the right to behave as he likes. Just take a look at his marks-book. It's enough to make your hair stand on end."

"Not mine," said Uncle Petya's friend, stroking his bald head.

"In the good old days he used to get threes, even twos. We were always saying to him: 'Be a man, Yuri, don't get such bad marks.' And now look what's happened. My son used to be a nice sub-man, then he listened to us and turned into a real man, and began to study well and behave well too, but now he's gradually turned into a kind of super-man."

"You know what the scientists say," I said. "That man uses only six per cent of his brain's efficiency or coefficient of performance!"

"Everyone else uses six per cent, but you use six times two—twelve?" father asked.

"What if it's six times six—thirty six?" I asked father.

"What is it? The Ivanov phenomenon?" Uncle Petya chimed in.

"I see!" said Uncle Petya's friend. "So it's a question of percentages."

"I think it's a sort of trick," said Uncle Petya. "Somebody once told me that during the civil law examinations in the Law Department of Göttingen University one of the students asked permission to leave the hall when he had been given his examination question. So he went out. The rules there allow you to leave the hall during an examination, because there are special overseers on duty everywhere, even in the toilets. It was they who discovered what the student was really doing as he "talked quietly to himself" in one of the cubicles. In fact he had a mini-transmitter in his watch and a miniature radio receiver concealed inside his jacket. The student was not admitted to any more law examinations, but as a tribute to his engineering skill, the committee recommended that he should study technical subjects. For the would-be lawyer had actually

designed and assembled the receiving and transmitting devices of his "radio-crib" himself. Stand up and let me search you, Yuri. Perhaps you've got something like that hidden on you."

I stood up and allowed myself to be searched.

"No, he's a kind of super ... super ... super..," said father.

"Come on, father, make an effort and guess who your son is, come on," I wanted to say to him.

"He's a kind of super-clever, super-mysterious super-hooligan!"

"At the end of our talk I should just like to leave you with one very useful thought," I said.

This made my father almost explode.

"Just a minute!" he exclaimed. "What's going on here? Who's checking who? Who's finding out about who? Who's educating who? Who's teaching who? And who's hypnotising who?"

"Ah, that's what it's all about!" the thought flashed through my brain. "Father has invited a hypnotist, not just a doctor, to help him."

"It's impossible to reason with him in his normal state. So I beg you, hypnotise Yuri, if he will give his consent," said father. "Do you agree to be hypnotised?" he asked me.

"Of course, I do," I said. "If that's the way things are."

"Do you agree to hypnotise him?" father asked Uncle Petya's friend.

"I do," replied Uncle Petya's friend. "But I'm not sure that he will succumb to hypnosis."

"I'll succumb alright," I reassured him.

"And when you've been hypnotised, do you promise us that starting from tomorrow you'll study moderately well and get at least a three for something! Try to impress upon him," father turned to Uncle Petya's friend, "that he ... no, you'd better explain why all this is necessary when he's in a trance."

Uncle Petya's friend and I went into my room and in exactly thirty minutes' time I returned to the dining room as if nothing had happened. Uncle Petya and father were sitting with their eyes fixed on my door. Seeing me come out alone, father asked:

"Where's the doctor?"

"He's asleep," I said.

"How can he be asleep?" father and Uncle Petya exclaimed in unison.

"It's very simple. I hypnotised him."

"But how did you hypnotise him?" father asked in amazement.



"He couldn't hypnotise me, but I hypnotised him," I explained. "He was talking to me, then he began saying 'sleep, sleep, sleep!' You know my schedule says I'm supposed to go to sleep at ten o'clock today, and it's only four thirty now."

"We've all been had, and the hypnotist most of all!" Uncle Petya burst out laughing and laughed so hard that it brought tears to his eyes.

I had no idea what was so funny about it, comrades of posterity.

"Wake him up," shouted father. "Wake up the hypnotist this very minute!"

"Of course. Anything you say," I replied.

The three of us went into my room. Father and Uncle Petya saw the hypnotist lying on my bed in a deep trance.

"The patient is in a deep hypnotic trance of the third degree," I said. "The depth of the hypnosis is usually divided into three degrees: sleepiness, hypotaxis and somnambulism. Sleepiness is associated with light dozing and general relaxation of the muscles. Hypotaxis, which is characterised by the suppression of free movement, is often accompanied by something called catalepsy, a state of balanced muscle tonicity in which the arm, leg or head of the hypnotised person can maintain artificial postures for a long time. The somnambulist stage is the state of deepest hypnosis. During somnambulism various visual, oral and aural olfactory hallucinations can be induced into the hypnotised subject."

"Stop lecturing and wake up the doctor at once," said father desperately.

"Perhaps Yuri's brain doesn't work at six times six," I heard behind me.

"Perhaps it's six times eight—forty-eight?" said Uncle Petya quietly.

"What is going on? I can't understand a thing," father exclaimed quietly.

"A vermillion table's going on," I explained to father, and suddenly pulled open the cupboard door. Inside were Kirillov-Shamshurin and Danilova. "Out you come, conspiracy of the doomed!" And I began to bring the doctor out of his third-degree hypnotic trance.

Memoir Fifteen

I EVEN KNOW WHAT I DON'T KNOW

I had pulled on my jacket, dear comrades of posterity, and was just thinking that I hadn't been attacked with a poem for a long time, when I discovered a rolled up piece of paper in my right pocket. I pulled it out and unrolled it. It was a poem, of course. The poem had a strange

title and this time it was directly connected with space. Judge for yourselves: the title of the poem was "On Yubis, the Far-Away Star". Then came the following quatrains, if I can call them that:

*Silence fell on the spaceship,
The cosmonaut touched his guitar,
And the strings sang, oh, so quietly
On Yubis, the far-away star.*

*No wind will ever blow there,
No brook sing the time of year...
The guitar plucks at their heart strings
On Yubis, the far-away star.*

*One love-sick lad is dreaming
Of blue eyes on Earth afar.
The guitar makes him remember
On Yubis, the far-away star.*

*A second longs for his homeland
And Mum by the window ajar.
The guitar is homesick with him
On Yubis, the far-away star.*

*A third sees the fields at sunrise
And yearns for the soft touch of grass.
The guitar sings them songs of Russia
On Yubis, the far-away star.*

*The meadows at home are greening...
The cosmonaut strums his guitar.
Its galaxy call-sign is beaming
From Yubis, the brightly lit star.*

After reading the poem, I scribbled the following resolution across the text: "There is no such star as Yubis. The poem is about cosmonauts, and therefore does not bear any relation to me, a super-cosmonaut." Then I filed the poem away with my memoirs so that I would put it into code that evening, went out and hurried off to school for the concert.

On the way I dropped in to see a boy I know and collect a sack of extraweight. I go gliding with a junior group (under the surname Nesterov). But I don't weigh enough, so they gave me and another boy a chitty for a sack of compressed sawdust. I collected the sack and on the way to the school declaimed the only thing that I regard as a poem. This is what it was: "The scarlet of the spring sunset has faded. A sprinkling of stars appears on the darkened horizon. In the southern hemisphere shines the zodiac constellation of Leo. Above it lies the Great Bear, that we know from childhood, and a little further down, the constellation of Coma Berenices.

"To the left of Leo, in the south-east lies the constellation of Virgo with the bluish-white star of Spica. Virgo is a very interesting constellation. There is a magnificent conglomeration of galaxies in this section. These remote stellar systems number about two thousand five hundred.

"The most outstanding is the elliptical galaxy M87 which has a huge mass, far greater than that of such a vast galaxy as misty Andromeda."

I walked to school without a care in the world. The only thing that worried me slightly was that the last few days and today had been so busy that I hadn't had a chance to even flick through the textbooks and other material essential for a meeting with people involved in amateur theatricals. They have their own scholarly records, textbooks, directories, etc. It was an almost insoluble problem but no problems are insoluble for us, super-cosmonauts.

"Let's see what solution I find to this insoluble problem," I thought. I ran into the school and in a few bounds mounted the staircase to the assembly hall. By the hall doors stood a whole detachment of pupils guarding this entrance to the temple of amateur theatricals.

I stopped to appraise the situation. Maslov and Lev Kirkinsky looked at me and exchanged meaningful glances. Lena Marchenko and Vera Danilova also exchanged glances and looked surprised.

"Enter the All-Rounder," said Lev Kirkinsky.

"Yet another nickname," I thought, taking no notice of Kirkinsky.

"Well, what's new? What new crazy ideas are whizzing about in the ether?" Vera asked Lena Marchenko.

"One crazy idea whizzing about is that you sleep when you're awake, and are awake when you're asleep!" Lena said to Vera.

"That's a crazy idea alright!" Maslov agreed with the girls.

"But is it crazy enough to be really brilliant, as Nils Bohr said?" Lev Kirkinsky asked everyone.

During this conversation all eyes were fixed on me, of course, or rather, on my extra-weight sack. I put it down in front of me on the stairs.

"Yet another mystery," said Vera Danilova. "A sack... What sort of sack? What could this mean?"

"I think it's a famous sack that was once used to do someone in, round some dark corner," Kirkinsky suggested.

I could have devastated Kirkinsky at once, personally, but I wanted to devastate them all together.

"Some two thousand years ago," I said, addressing all of them, particularly Kuttyrev, who kept hiding and peeping out from behind Maslov's broad back, "the Roman poet and satirist Juvenal wrote that people who stand around doing nothing (I stressed the words 'stand around doing nothing') want nothing but bread and entertainment!" So saying I attempted to enter the hall, but the guards rallied around Maslov and would not let me.

"No admittance to all-rounders and outsiders," said Maslov, addressing me. "Outsiders in the sense of people not taking part in the concert."

"Are you going to have a dress rehearsal here?" I asked Maslov.

"Yes," he confirmed.

"Do you know why it's called a dress rehearsal?" I asked Maslov.

"Why?"

"Because I, Ivanov, am going to address it. In fact I'm very surprised not to have received an invitation to it. You should invite me, consult me and, in general, get my permission."

"That's a prefabricated idea," said Lev Kirkinsky.

"Well, what do you expect from him?" asked Maslov. "After all, he's asleep now, and a person is not responsible for his words and actions when he is asleep."

"What's that? What's that?" The question flashed through my brain. "How do they know about sleeping when you're awake and being awake in your sleep? There must be an information leak, but how and where?" I again tried to force my way into the assembly hall, without actually provoking them, but they would not let me.

"What's the matter? Do you want some unidentified flying objects to appear?" I asked.

"A descendant of Genghis Ham's," said Lena Marchenko.

"A neutrino particle doesn't react with anything or anyone in the world," I said.

"It's time you had your block knocked off for all that," said Maslov.

"There are some ... thingumajigs, I don't even know what they're called, so let's say planarias. Well, if you knock a planaria's head off, it grows another one," I retorted.

"There's no point in knocking off a planaria's head," said Lev Kirkinsky, "but there is in knocking off yours."

"By the time you've managed, and I don't say you can, to knock off my head, it will already have grown again."

"Are there really such things as planarias," Vera Danilova asked me, perfectly seriously this time. "I thought it was only lizards that grew their tails again."

"Yes, there are! When a knocked off head grows again, I'll let you knock off mine as a demonstration."

"I can imagine how horrific that would be," said Victor Maslov. "Yuri Ivanov with two heads! It's bad enough with one, but two! That's enough to make you quit the planet Earth."

"Let him through, kids," said Kutyrev. "He'd talk the hind leg off a donkey."

I heaved the extra-weight sack over my shoulder and...

"That there," said Kutyrev, squinting at my sack of sawdust. "It won't blow up, will it?"

"Not if I like your scatty sketches..."

"But he really is an outsider." Maslov barred my way. "An outsider for us and what we're doing. If he understood the slightest thing about the theatre..."

"When you fight him, you really can get something from him," Kirkinsky supported Maslov. "But not in something like this... He'd only be a pest."

"I don't play your idiotic games, of course, but I know the rules of them, even the most idiotic ones."

"Said Mister X plus Y minus Z..." retorted Marchenko caustically.

"You know, Ivanov," said Boris Kutyrev. "Although we regard you as an all-rounder, you do have your limits. Why are you barging into our rehearsal when you don't understand a thing about it?"

"You don't know the first thing about the Stanislavsky system," Lev Kirkinsky supported Kutyrev. "Some of our amateur theatrical stars have gathered here tonight."

"I see," I stopped Kirkinsky with a devastating gesture and an even more devastating glance. "So you are amateur theatrical stars and, as such, you think I don't know the Stanislavsky system, is that it?"

"We're sure you don't," said Kirkinsky obstinately. "You've read an incredible amount and what you know you do know, of course, but I'm sure you haven't a clue about the Stanislavsky system..."

"You're only right about one thing, Kirkinsky: that I haven't studied the Stanislavsky system. I haven't studied it, but..." I cast a telescopic glance that embraced all the amateur theatrical stars and added: "But I know it inside out."

Then followed what I would call a magic pause, during which something quite amazing happened to me, although I am used to not being amazed by myself. I suddenly had the feeling that I not only knew the Stanislavsky system, but understood it perfectly. This feeling grew into the conviction that I really did know the Stanislavsky system and understand it perfectly, although I had never even glanced at a book about it.

I had managed to squeeze a few more coppers out of my brain cop! This was perhaps six times eight, not six times six, as Uncle Petya had said.

What followed after that, dear comrades of posterity, I must first explain. First for myself, and then for you.

How could it happen that I suddenly understood the Stanislavsky system perfectly without ever having studied it? What was the explanation? A computer can solve any mathematical task, from multiplication tables to the most incredible integrals, because every solution, even the most complex, is a precise combination of all sorts of figures. In the same way my knowledge of the Stanislavsky system grew out of some mysterious table of veneration for the knowledge accumulated by mankind, a veneration table that my brain probably possessed quite automatically. After all, knowledge is also a precise combination of precise words.

"So you think I don't know the Stanislavsky system, do you?" I looked round at the whole galaxy of amateur theatrical stars.

They all stared back at me sceptically, and the most sceptical of all was Arutun Akopov, a star trickster and amateur manipulator. His latest trick, which he had shown the day before in class just before a lesson, he called "Against the laws of physics". It was a really corny one. Akopov placed a ruler on the palm of his hand, then turned his palm down to face the floor, and following the laws of gravity the ruler fell to the ground. Then he picked the ruler up, put it on the palm of his hand again and once more turned his palm downwards, but this time the ruler did not fall down.

"There's a trick for doing everything," I said, to Akopov in particular.

"Your trick, Arutiun, is that you have a piece of strong, thin cotton the colour of your skin attached to your cuff and your middle finger. And the second time you bend your palm slightly and slide the ruler under the cotton without anyone seeing." I paused and then went on. "But the Stanislavsky system does not have any tricks. It has a secret. And the secret is this..." Here I gave another pause like a row of dots and continued: "Stanislavsky's views on the art of acting were formed on the basis of the realistic traditions of the Russian 19th-century theatre, founded by the work of Alexander Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol and Alexander Ostrovsky and embodied in the acting of Shchepkin, Shumsky, Martynov and Sadovsky." Listing their names gave me particular pleasure.

Then I said that he, Stanislavsky, tried to find the general laws of acting. After that I expanded on the fact that he (and I almost added "like me") was very given to self-analysis, as can be seen from his diaries (and here I almost added "like mine"). But at this point I was suddenly interrupted by the voice of Lev Kirkinsky.

"I cherish the faint hope that you, Ivanov, do not know in which year Stanislavsky met Nemirovich-Danchenko, do you?"

"The year 1897," I said, taking a deep breath, "saw the famous meeting of Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko, as a result of which it was decided..."

"Let the All-Rounder in," said Kutyrev, pale and clinging on to the banisters. Maslov moved away from the door. I pulled it open and went into the assembly hall.

"Have you ever watched a moth fly?" asked Maslov, who had followed me into the hall.

I stopped. Maslov drew a silly wiggly line in the air with his index finger.

"That's what your thoughts are like. It's impossible to follow them. "Rockets fly and ... ~~moths~~ fly too. What a difference!" he muttered, walking after me,

But I ~~was~~ no longer listening to him. I sat down in the seventh row. Although I had warned all those taking part in the dress rehearsal, as I came into the hall, that I had arrived and therefore they could begin, and although Boris Kutyrev had repeated my words in what I thought was a rather flippant tone: "Ivanov's arrived! You may begin now!", the dress rehearsal did anything but begin. All the time someone or something was missing. Then, when that someone or something that had disappeared reappeared again, another someone or something disappeared. No, this was

not a serious business and the people involved in it were not serious either. They were all shouting, bickering and squabbling, Boris Kutyrev in particular.

"Listen, Kutyrev," I said, turning to him. "I once saw a documentary film about the launching of a space ship. They do things quite differently there. Everybody is in the right place, nobody needs to look for anybody, and nothing suddenly disappears or reappears again. Why don't you follow their example and announce a fifteen-minute count-down, then ten minutes, then one minute, then: eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one... ignition!"

Kutyrev gave me a somewhat bewildered look, and I realised that this suggestion had been too complicated for him. So I reduced my demands and said:

"Listen, Kutyrev. There's a leaflet called 'The Psychological Aspects of Personnel Placement.' It says that in personnel recruitment and placement it is advisable to be guided by the theory of the relationship between a person's inborn and acquired qualities, on the basis of which his abilities are formed. Abilities in psychology are the sum total of a person's more or less stable features that have been produced in the course of his activity and are a prerequisite for the successful performance of certain types of activity."

After this Kutyrev gave me an even more bewildered look and said:

"Have mercy, Ivanov!"

I had mercy on him. I said no more.

"Have you worked on your part?" Kutyrev asked again.

"If you call all that work," I said, gesturing at the assembly hall, "I have worked."

At last everything and everyone managed by some miracle to be in the right place, and Boris Kutyrev delivered a long and wordy speech resembling a lecture on the art of acting and speech technique...

How impressive it sounded—"the art of acting" and "speech technique". At the end of his speech Kutyrev appealed for assistance to Alexander Pushkin, who, according to him, had summed up the art of acting brilliantly in the lines: "How rightly you have understood your part and with what art, as if the words were born not of slavish memory, but of the heart!"

"Fancy wasting your memory and your heart on that!" I thought to myself, furiously squeezing the tennis ball in my hand. I put my hand on my pulse—it was normal, fifty-two beats per minute.

The visit to the dress rehearsal was the biggest overload I had endured recently, of course. And this was only to be expected. I was not accustomed to the theatre. I couldn't even remember when I had last been to the cinema.

It is easiest for a person to take overload in the direction from his chest to his back. It has been proved by space flights that the best position for a cosmonaut in his seat is at an angle of forty-five degrees to the direction of the acceleration. True, at an angle of eighty degrees to the acceleration the cosmonaut is capable of withstanding an extraordinary amount of overload, twenty-six and a half times more. But in the assembly hall I could not adopt this eighty-degree pose, of course, to face the overload of the school concert. I would have had to watch it lying down, which would have thrown the amateur theatrical stars completely.

In fact I would have liked nothing better than to be sitting in my room at home, looking through a telescope at the real stars, and not at these "amateur theatrical stars", as Boris Kutyrev called his troupe.

I took up a suitable pose at an angle of forty-five degrees and said:

"You may begin! Come on, all of you, show us according to what system you are all wasting time together. Or are you about to make some great discoveries at a meeting-point of the systems?"

"Have mercy, kind sir!" begged Kutyrev.

"Switch on all systems!" I said and explained: "That means that all the launching mechanisms are set in motion! Lock the venting! Eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one. Ignition!"

"Okay, kids, let's start!" Kutyrev translated my space jargon into everyday speech.

The curtain began to rise slowly.

Memoir Sixteen

A BLIND SPACE FLIGHT AND SUDDEN INSIGHT

Onto the stage came Anya Brunova carrying a balalaika. Walking up to the footlights, she stopped with a heavy sigh. "She's nervous," I thought, looking at her.

"Don't look at my balalaika like a cat at an aquarium, Ivanov," Brunova suddenly addressed me. "I know it without you telling me... How old is the balalaika?" She continued somewhat unexpectedly. "Of all

the folk instruments it is the 'youngest'—barely three hundred years old. It is first mentioned in 1714 in the *Register* compiled by Peter the Great. The Emperor gave orders for a wedding celebration to be accompanied by a procession of mummers and a huge orchestra that included a balalaika..."

"That's not in the script, Brunova!" Boris Kutyrev yelled at her.

"Well, why must he sit there looking as if he's about to burst into a lecture on the balalaika at any moment?"

"Please don't burst out in the middle of a rehearsal, Ivanov," Kutyrev said to me quietly. "And ... and don't criticise anybody".

I kept quiet.

"And another request," Boris Kutyrev said to me in a melancholy voice. "Now that we all know you even know the Stanislavsky system, would you kindly sit still without saying anything and don't undermine my authority! If I'd known that you knew the Stanislavsky system inside out, I would never... And anyway you're here by accident! Ivanovs may come and go at dress rehearsals, but Kutyrevs stay forever."

Brunova was still standing calmly on the stage and not beginning her lines.

"I thought Brunova was nervous," I mused. "But look at her now. She wants to lead me into ... or, quite the reverse, take me out of... It's no good, Brunova. You'll never lead me in or take me out... What a pity she doesn't go to the space club like Maslov... I could recommend her for the crew that's going to take me to my galactic destination. Otherwise they might include Maslov instead, and what good is he? Not much. The best cosmonaut of all the actors or, rather, the best actor of all the cosmonauts."

"When I was little, I used to love fairy tales. I still do. And I envy everyone who has their own magician and their own magic words," Brunova was saying in a kind of sincere and, I would say, honest way, exactly according to the Stanislavsky system which I had found to my amazement that I knew inside out.

Brunova was continuing, as she had begun, according to that very system:

"As a child I tried to use other people's magic words, but they never worked.

"For example, I was very fond of the magic words: 'He struck a pan of brass and cried "Kara-baras"!' We had a brass pan that grandma used for making jam. One day when everyone had gone out, I sat down

to do my homework. But I couldn't solve any problems or learn anything. So I took out the brass pan, thumped it with my fist and cried: 'Kara-baras!' Nothing happened. Then I said like the story-teller in *The Snow Queen* 'Snip-snap-snurre-purre-baselurre...' But still nothing happened, and I couldn't do my homework. I cried in vain: 'By the will of the pike, do as I like—give me the answers!'—But it was no good. Then I realised that you must try to find your own magician and your own magic words, if other people's don't help.

"So I went round the town and listened to what people were saying as they worked. Here they were building a house and shouting: 'Heave ho!' 'Up she goes!' The walls of the house began to grow before my eyes. Then I watched some football players at a stadium: 'Come on, Misha, have another try!' Then some ice-hockey players: 'Pass again, Kharlamov! Pass again! One more try! Go-o-oal!' I saw a person trying to break a swimming record and this is what I heard: 'Come on, try harder!' Then I went to the circus: 'Hoop-la! One more try!' Then to a ballet school, where I heard: 'A one! And a two! And a three! And—try once more!' 'Come on!' said the bulldozer driver, putting his foot down on the pedals. 'Try again!'

"It's fantastic, I thought, guessing that there was something magical about the words 'Try again.' 'Try again! Try once more! One more try!' Then I understood everything. Those were the magic words I was looking for: 'TRY AGAIN!' And I wanted to become Magician TRYAGAIN! So I went and composed a magic ditty. Because you can't become a magician without a ditty.

"And this is what I wrote: 'I AM TRYAGAIN, the magician, and I help all those who are crying because they can't do something, but you must work cheerfully, not for show, so no one is surprised, and, of course, repeat: one more try, try again, never give up!' But it wasn't a proper song.

"I'm no magician," I thought, when I read this through. "That's not much of a song. It doesn't even rhyme." Then I remembered that I must keep trying to be a magician. And suddenly, at about the two-hundredth try the words began to rhyme:

*I'm Magician TRYAGAIN,
I help, as you may know,
Everyone who fails first time
And is feeling low.*

*If you want things to go well
When you are at work or play
Just remember, boys and girls,
This is what you have to say:
'Try again! Try again!'*

*And your work will seem much lighter
If you just repeat each time
Two magic words that make it brighter
'Try again! Try again!'* "

While Anya Brunova was performing her fairy tale about Magician TRYAGAIN according to the Stanislavsky method, I was not wasting time, of course, and was doing four things at once as usual: squeezing a tennis ball in my pocket with my right hand, rhythmically pressing a tennis ball to the floor with the tip of my right foot, doing a crossword (across: 12. Payment for transporting goods by water. 13. Stringed instrument. 15. Resort in the Crimea. 17. Volcanic rock used as building material) and thinking about the physical action method.

It was something of a surprise for me to discover that I understood not only the Stanislavsky method, but also another method used by producers in their work with actors, the so-called physical action method. Very briefly and roughly this method is as follows: unlike the Stanislavsky method that puts the actor in a correct external state through a correct inner state, that is, through the inner to the outer, the physical action method tries through an actor's correct physical behaviour to put him in the required inner state, that is, the reverse, through the outer to the inner...

"What did you think of the fairy tale about Magician TRYAGAIN, Ivanov?" asked Kutyrev.

"You should all be thrown to the piranhas at low water..." I said slowly. "All except Anya... Actually it wasn't bad. I quite liked it."

"Ivanov quite liked it! Ivanov quite liked it! Ivanov quite liked it!" The words sped round the hall and the stage.

"But later on when ... just bear in mind ... in spite of ... I give my permission, but I couldn't quite work out what system you are following. By the way, Boris, about the meeting-point of the theatrical sciences... You don't know, I am sure, that apart from the Stanislavsky method,

there is the so-called physical action method in working with actors." I couldn't resist the urge to lecture these lazy, complacent beginners on the physical action method.

"Be a good fellow, Ivanov. Don't ruin my career as a producer," Boris Kutyrev beseeched me. "You promised not to let off steam."

"If you lack the knowledge, don't try, if you lack the ability, don't cry," I whispered with my lips alone, and decided to myself: "I will ruin that Kutyrev, only not now! Later! That'll teach him not to try and produce without a method."

"Your presence is disconcerting enough as it is," Kutyrev went on complaining. "The juggler's never dropped a pin before, but today with you here he hasn't been able to catch one. And none of the actors have done anything on stage that they were supposed to. Except Anya..."

"Has the juggler already done his act?" I asked in surprise.

For some reason I had been too absorbed in my thoughts to notice the juggler.

"Listen, Brunova. I want to have a serious talk to you. So come round and see me."

"When?" asked Anya.

She was so flustered by my suggestion, that she even blushed and exclaimed:

"Thy will be done, Lord! What a lucky girl I am! Ivanov has made a date with me! Where shall I write it down?"

"Where? In your memoirs, of course," I couldn't help blurting out.

"And when shall I come?" Brunova went on chanting.

"In about fifteen or twenty years' time."

This flustered her even more and she blushed an even deeper shade of red.

"In fifteen years' time I shall have a jealous husband," she said.

I liked her resourcefulness. All the people working with a super-cosmonaut should be resourceful, and the super-cosmonaut himself should be super-resourceful. Everything was fine.

"Come on, everyone, let's do a bit of work," pleaded Kutyrev.

"Go ahead," I agreed, knowing that what I had come for was about to begin.

"We will now act the farce," said Kuttyrev, addressing me. "Only promise you won't interrupt us with your lectures until the end."

"I'll do more than that," I answered. "If I like your farce, I'll endow your buffoons with the skills of the geckones!"

"What geccos?" exclaimed Kuttyrev in alarm.

"The geckones that walk on the ceiling." At great speed I informed them that the geckones family of a species of lizard could crawl along completely smooth vertical surfaces and run over the ceiling as if it were the floor, in pursuit of small insects.

"But why do we need a present like that from you," asked Kuttyrev in surprise.

"Why?" I said. "You're doing a skit on space, so your clowns will have to walk across the ceiling like geckones."

"Well, I hope you're not going to endow us with these skills now," said Kuttyrev.

"Oh, no," I replied. "Later on, of course."

"Oh, later on," Kuttyrev breathed a sigh of relief. "That's different. Don't be in a hurry with your present."

So saying Kuttyrev disappeared behind the curtain. Then he came out again. I stared hard at him, alert and curious.

"And now we present you a skit," Boris Kuttyrev announced uncertainly in a loud voice, "entitled *The Blind Space Flight!* Part one: *Three, Two, One. Ignition!* Part two: *Going along Jupiter Street!*"

The curtains opened and what I saw on the stage caused me some confusion. The backcloth was painted with space subjects from pictures by the painter Sokolov and the cosmonaut and artist Alexei Leonov. But on the stage itself was an ordinary chair standing under three metal pipes welded into a tripod. On the tripod, running over a pulley, was a thick rope, one end of which was tied to the back of the chair. The other end was held by five or six kids in full-pressure suits. I had expected to see at least a model of a rocket with an umbilical mast on the stage, but here was a chair and next to it for some reason a zinc bucket with a handle.

Then some tape-recorded electronic space music started and onto the stage came Boris and Victor. They were dressed in mock space suits and silly clown's shoes with long tips. Victor's costume was embroidered with dazzling white sequins like stars, and blue moons. And Boris's costume was embroidered with bright red sequins and adorned with glittering spirals and red stars. In fact it was all very effective and impressive.

"I see," I thought. "The kids are performing in the old classical masks of the red and the white clown, only with a space-age design. Not bad," I thought and was about to ask whether this was a 'circus entrée' or a 'bouffe' clown act, but refrained because I had given my word to Boris Kuttyrev not to interrupt the rehearsal with my lectures. So that is why I am reproducing this farce in my memoirs, scene by scene, just as it is imprinted in my memory and as it was written and produced by its author and producer Boris Kuttyrev.

THE BLIND FLIGHT

A farce

PART ONE

"Three, Two, One. Ignition!"

White cosmonaut. And now, Vitya, I'd like to train you...

Red cosmonaut. You've already trained me... Now it's my turn!
(*To the circus hands.*) Give me my bucko-helmet!

An ordinary bucket with a handle is brought into the ring. There are head-phones, wires and all sorts of weird tubes attached to it.

White cosmonaut. What on earth is that?

Red cosmonaut. It's a ... navigational device for blind space flights ... a bucko-helmet! Put it on!

White cosmonaut. What for?

Red cosmonaut. You're going to fly now!

White cosmonaut. Where to?

Red cosmonaut. On an experimental blind space flight... (*Puts the bucko-helmet on Boris's head.*) Why are you quaking?

White cosmonaut. Oh, help. It's gone all dark!

Red cosmonaut. You want to fly to the Moon and you're afraid of the dark! Don't worry, we'll turn on your star-vision when necessary. You'll be able to watch the screen and tell us what you can see in space... Star-rover, please!

The circus hands carry out an ordinary chair with wheel-barrow handles. The chair is covered with plastic.

Here's the star-rover, Boris. Get in.

Boris quakes.



If you quake like that, the star-rover will fall to bits in the air, Boris.

White cosmonaut. Okay. I won't... (*Quakes even more. Sits down on the chair. Sings.*) "In vain the old woman awaits her son's return..."

Victor fixes the rope round Boris's waist.

Red cosmonaut. Five minutes after launching we will give the order, and the star-rover will begin to lose altitude. Okay?

White cosmonaut. Okay. I hope you'll see your old friend gets a soft landing, Victor...

Red cosmonaut. I'll make sure you do.

White cosmonaut. And how will I make sure that I'm in contact with you?

Red cosmonaut. With the help of this bucko-helmet. I'll just test it... Can you hear me?

White cosmonaut. Yes, I can.

Red cosmonaut. You haven't changed your mind about going, have you?

White cosmonaut. It's too l-l-late!

Red cosmonaut. That's right. And what would you like to say before take-off?

White cosmonaut. Wa-wa-wa-wa...

Red cosmonaut. What?

White cosmonaut. Wa-wa-wa-wa...

Red cosmonaut. *Don't worry, Boris!* I'll translate that for our viewers. Boris wants to say that he's very proud and happy to be making the first experimental clown flight instead of me...

White cosmonaut. Wa-wa-wa-wa...

Red cosmonaut. That's enough talking... Prepare for launching!

The circus hands get hold of the chair handles.

Boris! Listen! It's me, Victor!

White cosmonaut. Wa-wa-wa-wa...

Red cosmonaut. He's still yacking away! (*Bangs the bucket with a wooden mallet.*) Will you listen to me?

White cosmonaut. Yes!

Red cosmonaut. Listen, Boris. At the beginning of the flight the star-rover will take off slowly and you will fly past some tree-tops. Don't be afraid if you bump into them... Prepare for take-off!

White cosmonaut. Oh, my goodness!

Red cosmonaut. Don't worry, I'm with you! (*Victor puts his hands on Boris's shoulders.*) Switch on the first engine!

There is a roar.

White cosmonaut. Hey, I've changed my mind!

Red cosmonaut. It's too late, Boris! You've already taken off!

The circus hands begin to lift up the chair. Victor kneels down. Boris thinks that Victor has stayed on the ground and that he is going up on his own. The chair is raised higher. Boris grabs hold of Victor's arms. The circus hands shake the chair.

It's Victor! You're flying past the tree-tops, Boris... Careful! (*Tickles Boris with a branch.*)

White cosmonaut. Oh, help! (*Grabs the branch.*)

Victor pulls the branch away from Boris.

Red cosmonaut. Keep calm. You'll begin to feel the overload acting on you now.

The circus hands pull Boris up higher on the rope. Victor and about four other people hang on Boris.

White cosmonaut. What's that?

Red cosmonaut. Overload!

White cosmonaut. Oo, it's heavy!

The circus hands and Victor let go of Boris and pull off his trousers at the same time. He is left in his underpants.

Help! They're undressing me! Why don't the police do something!

Red cosmonaut. Keep calm, Boris! You don't expect to find police in space, do you?

White cosmonaut. Who pulled my trousers off?

Red cosmonaut. It was overload. Now the state of weightlessness

will begin... *(They lift Boris higher on the rope, until he is hanging in the air, making swimming movements with his hands.)*

The circus hands tug the rope.

White cosmonaut. What was that?

Red cosmonaut. Air pockets!

White cosmonaut. Surely they could have filled them up, couldn't they? What a road surface!

Red cosmonaut. Here! *(Puts a piece of cotton-wool into Boris's hands.)*

White cosmonaut. What's that?

Red cosmonaut. You're flying through cloud.

White cosmonaut. Can't you give me some light? It's awfully dark.

Red cosmonaut. I'm turning the star-vision on! Can you see stars, Boris?

White cosmonaut. No, I can't see anything...

Red cosmonaut *(bangs the bucket with the wooden mallet.)*
Can you see stars now?

White cosmonaut. Yes, now I can...

Red cosmonaut. Where are they coming from?

White cosmonaut. Out of my eyes...

Red cosmonaut. Do they look nice?

White cosmonaut. I wouldn't exactly say so...

The red cosmonaut bangs the bucket with the wooden mallet.

Come in!

The red cosmonaut sticks a lighted candle into the white cosmonaut's outstretched hand.

Ouch! That's hot? Why is it so hot?

Red cosmonaut. It's a red-hot meteorite.

For a person with a normal nervous system this spectacle would have been equivalent to stress, I would say. Stress places higher demands on the nervous system. The result is increased production of the hormones that help the body adapt to changes in the external environment. But

the cardio-vascular system, that carries out the basic adaptive reactions, often suffers during this hormonal reorganisation. My super-nervous super-system was quite calm, however. Meanwhile this is what was happening on the stage.

The red cosmonaut makes a sign to the circus hands who bring two buckets of water onto the stage. The white cosmonaut unexpectedly takes off his helmet and watches the red cosmonaut.

White cosmonaut. What's going to happen now?

Red cosmonaut. You're about to enter the cosmic rain zone.

White cosmonaut. Oh, am I? *(To the red cosmonaut.)* You're the one who's about to enter the cosmic rain zone...

The red cosmonaut turns round and sees the white cosmonaut without his helmet. The circus hands lower the rope. The white cosmonaut grabs a bucket of water and chases after the red cosmonaut with it.

"Hmm," I thought. "Today they're making fun of a white cosmonaut, but tomorrow they'll be having a go at the one and only super-cosmonaut. I must put an end to this 'having a go' once and for all, so no one will have the nerve to try it again."

I leapt up onto the stage to express forceful protest, as they say in diplomacy. I shouted at the top of my super-voice, and the fact that my voice is no ordinary one, but a super-voice, I had already verified on a noise meter. Incidentally, a London school recently held an unusual competition to see who could shout the loudest. About two-hundred schoolchildren came to test the strength of their vocal chords. The microphone with the noise meter was at a distance of one metre from the competitor. On average the competitors shouted at a level of 114 decibels. The winner was a twelve-year-old girl, who clocked up 122 decibels. None of the boys got closer than two decibels to the winner. And that's only natural. The only thing that girls are any good at is making a noise.

But, of course, this loud-mouthed English girl could take on anyone she liked, only not me. With a shout of 244 decibels I leapt onto the stage: "Do you realise what you are doing?" I flew up to the red and white clowns: "As numerous experiments carried out by Soviet scientists on a large centrifuge have shown, when the weight of the subjects is increased ten or twelve times they cease to see for a certain period. A

black veil covers their eyes. If the load is increased fifteen times, a person cannot last for more than ten seconds in this position. And what are you doing here? After lengthy experiments it has been proved that at an angle of eighty degrees to the acceleration a cosmonaut is capable of tolerating extraordinary overload, twenty-six-and-half times more than usual! And what do you think you're doing here?"

They said afterwards, dear comrades of posterity, that I had pushed the red clown-cosmonaut who was holding the lighted candle. In fact I myself saw that the force of my words was so strong that the flame flew off the candle and sped into the wings. The decor flared up, and the girls all shrieked in unison: "Fire! Fire!"

Part two
WHERE WERE YOU, CHARLES DARWIN?

Memoir Seventeen
*AN HOUR MINUS A SECOND IS NOT AN HOUR,
ONLY 59 MINUTES 59 SECONDS*

"Perhaps we really don't use the full potential of our brain's performance?" I heard my father saying in the next room. "Perhaps the scientists really are right?"

I listened. Father continued:

"Or perhaps it's the acceleration of the brain? For example, here I am suffering from insomnia because of my son and taking all sorts of sedatives, but it turns out that there is a natural sedative. Scientists managed to obtain venous blood from the brain of sleeping rabbits and passed it through a special filter to obtain the macro-molecules. This was then injected in other rabbits, and within ten or fifteen minutes the electro-encephalogram of these rabbits showed increased activity of the delta wave of the brain, characteristic of light sleep. This 'sleep substance' turned out to be protein."

"Yes," said mother. "For example, I'm always trying to slim and using all sorts of diets, but apparently there is a hormone that regulates the appetite. As soon as this hormone is secreted in the intestines, a person loses all interest in food. But I can only remember all that for an hour or two. How Yuri remembers everything all the time—I haven't got a clue."

"But you must have a clue," father advised mother.

"What's that? What's that?" flashed through my brain. "Where have my parents got all that knowledge from?" I ran to the half-open door and saw mother and father sitting at the table piled high with newspapers and magazines, reading each other all sorts of interesting bits of information.

"Oh, well, there's nothing wrong with that." I lay down on the bed, continuing my interrupted rest and listening to my father's voice from the next room.

"For example, here's the associative method of remembering," he said, peering at a newspaper. "The phenomenal memory of some people would appear to be connected with various tricks. But this is not exactly the case. Such people, apart from their extraordinary ability to remember things, also possess, for example, strong powers of concentration, clearly expressed associative thinking and a more or less conscious technique of remembering..." At this point father broke off his reading and said: "Perhaps the real point is, Masha, that people should either work or rest, because most of the time they don't do either. Perhaps Yuri has discovered this simple secret?"

According to my schedule my rest period should have been over, but since my gliding had gone on fifteen minutes longer than it was supposed to, I had added these fifteen minutes to the rest period. It was all because of my extra-weight sack with the compressed sawdust. I had forgotten to take it with me when I went up in the glider. At least the instructor thought I had forgotten, but in fact I had simply decided not to take it. I wanted to find out how the glider would behave if it did not have the prescribed load. Then an air current appeared from nowhere, and the glider with its light load shot up almost into space. I only just managed to handle it and landed it fifteen minutes later than I was scheduled to, so I increased my rest period by fifteen minutes and was listening in amazement to my parents' conversation.

"I always said my son had a great future," said mother.

"So great that he won't be able to cope with it," said father ironically. "And don't go boasting about your son so much. He's not the only one in the world. There are others just as good as him. Look at this!"

"So there are others just as good as me, are there?" I even sat up in bed. "Others just as good as me!" I repeated to myself and waited for father to explain this incredible assertion that anyone in the world could be as good as me.

"Look at this," father went on. "Twelve-year-old David Arutiunian has become a student at Yerevan Polytechnical Institute. He passed the entry examinations with distinction and is now studying in the computer section of the cybernetics faculty. In secondary school David needed a full school year twice only in the top class and the one before it."

"What's so marvellous about some David Arutiunian getting into a polytechnical institute," retorted mother. "If he wanted to our Yuri could get into any institute anywhere in the world, not just a polytechnic!"

"Good old mother!" I thought. I liked the fact that she never exaggerated my abilities but even played them down a bit.

At this point the phone rang. Father picked up the receiver and from what he said I realised that it was one of the amateur theatrical stars complaining about me and telling him about the fire at the dress rehearsal.

"Well, there we are," said father, replacing the receiver and returning to his conversation with mother. "Another piece of news: our son is responsible for a fire breaking out at school, but for some reason it doesn't worry me in the slightest."

"Because someone else started the fire and they're blaming it all on our son," mother replied.

"You always defend him, but that doesn't worry me nor does the fire. Do you know why?" father asked mother. Then he replied himself using my system. "Because I have developed a conditioned reflex against all the unpleasantness that my son causes me. Do you remember what a reflex is? You don't. Then I'll tell you what it is according to our son's system."

I heard father rummage in some papers, then say loudly:

"A reflex is the body's reaction to an irritant. If the irritation is repeated often, the body ceases to react. It can react to a single piece of unpleasantness, to two, ten, or twenty, but there will be no reaction to the thirtieth." Father had obviously got really worked up. After this he announced flatly: "That's enough. Although I don't have a reflex, my patience is exhausted. That's enough," he repeated. "After this fire I just don't know what to do!"

Father began to pace the room nervily, exclaiming from time to time.

"On the one hand, he knows everything! On the other hand, he doesn't even know how long the average person lives! On the third hand, he hypnotises hypnotists! On the twenty-third hand, he's taken the Laundry tags off his vests and washes them himself! On the fortieth hand, photos of

him appear in newspapers under different surnames! On the fifty-sixth hand he can multiply any numbers as fast as a computer! On the sixtieth hand, I found a note which shows that he plays cards! 'Cards tomorrow. Everything's at stake!'"

"Oh, my goodness," I gnashed my teeth and writhed in bed. "It's not cards, it's karts—go-karting, those children's racing cars. That's something I've taken up too! Oh, well, never mind. Read it now and find out later!"

"On the seventieth hand, they have rung up from the police-station to say that our son has been caught selling flowers illegally! No, my son is a super ... super ... super..." said father.

"Come on, father. Try a bit harder and guess who your son is," I begged him mentally.

"A super-clever super-hooligan!"

During these inexplicably strong emotions experienced by my father there was another ring, this time at the door, and I sensed him shudder in the next room.

"I can't bear it," he exclaimed after a short pause. "You go and open it! I can't! I'm afraid!"

Mother opened the front door and about three minutes later there was a knock at the door of my room. Then the door opened, and my father's anxious face appeared.

"It's a parcel," he said in a scared voice. Everything seems to frighten him these days. "Were you expecting a parcel from anyone?" Father was holding a rather big book wrapped in paper and tied up with string.

"Yes, I was."

"What were you expecting?" father asked in a very scared voice.

"Poems," I said. "I'm expecting poems." I was sure I had been sent a poem.

"Why poems and who from?"

"I don't know why and I don't know who from, but I am expecting them."

I took the parcel and unwrapped it. Inside was a book entitled *My Autobiography* written by the famous naturalist Charles Darwin. "This is something new," I thought, opening the book. There I saw a piece of paper with a poem on it.

"And this is something old," I thought, looking at the paper with its rhyming lines. This is what was written on it:

*How sad it is, how very sad.
He doesn't laugh, or dance, or sing.
And this, of course, leads to a bad
Case of emotional weakening.*

*How far from the ideal, poor lad.
His head's full of theoretical notions.
And this, of course, leads to a bad
Case of weakening the emotions.*

*How rational it is. I'm told
He's never sad, no, not a trace.
This is, of course, what Darwin called
An emotional weakening case.*

At the end of the poem was a note that said: "When you have read this poem open Charles Darwin's autobiography at the page with the book mark and read the passage underlined in red pencil." I opened the book and did as I was told, reading the passage that was underlined, and for the first time wiped my brow in perplexity. I would never have thought Charles Darwin could cause me so much trouble.

Yes, the great naturalist Charles Darwin had given me a real headache. It would have been better if I hadn't read his autobiography. Because of him I would have to find room for singing, dancing and poetry-reading lessons in my log-book. What else could I do if the old man had written in his biography that "if he had to live his life again, he would never have immersed himself entirely in his science..." He actually said that devoting oneself to a single science "weakens the emotional side of one's nature". And is not only "tantamount to losing happiness", but also "has a detrimental effect on one's mental abilities...". Singing or dancing are not all that pleasurable, of course. In fact, they're sheer torment, you could say, but if they are necessary to stop your brain from getting rusty, you'll do them, of course, without a moment's hesitation.

Deep in thought, I began to stride about the room. In fact I was almost running, so deeply had Charles Darwin upset me with his words to the effect that I, like him, had been "weakening the emotional side of my nature" and that this was "tantamount to losing happiness"! I decided at once "to strengthen the emotional side of my nature", which was probably tantamount to acquiring happiness, without delay.



"Well, that famous naturalist Charles Darwin really has given me a headache," I thought.

"Who's the parcel from?" asked father, glancing in.

"Charles Darwin," I replied.

"It can't be," father shuddered. "Charles Darwin's dead. You couldn't have got a parcel from him."

"The parcel's not from him personally," I explained.

Father disappeared, vanishing into thin air, as it were.

I was already thinking up the call signs: "Circle here. Circle here! Receiving you loud and clear. Over!"

Why did I choose the call-sign Circle for myself? Because a circle is the most perfect figure. Take a hexagon in a bee-hive, for example. There's a figure that requires a minimum of material and produces a maximum of durability. But to my mind a circle is the most perfect, most beautiful line in the world. No wonder the Earth and all the planets are circular. That is why I chose the call-sign Circle for myself.

But now, after I had failed to be interested in the arts and had weakened my human nature, as Charles Darwin put it, I could no longer consider myself to be a CIRCLE. The line of the circle did not join up in my case, and circles of lines that don't join up are not circles at all, just as an hour minus one second is only fifty-nine minutes and fifty-nine seconds, and just as a water melon with one slice cut out of it is not a complete water melon. So that was why I inserted a visit to the singing lesson in my schedule for the next day. Naturally an ironical smile would play on my lips throughout the lesson so that no one thought I was taking it seriously.

This year I had tried to skip the singing lesson all the time. I must say that in this respect our school is somewhat unusual. It has a musical bias so everyone from the first form to the tenth has singing lessons. When I couldn't skip them, I used to upset them by deliberately singing louder than anyone else and off-key, for which I was sent out. But how I regretted that now! Perhaps it was too late for me to start singing. Perhaps my super-cosmonaut training had already "weakened the emotional side of my nature" so much that this had "affected my super-mental super-powers", or even super-affected them, although it couldn't have done that, it had only affected them. And was all this really "tantamount to losing one's happiness?"

No, it couldn't be. I wasn't as old as Charles Darwin was when he wrote that in his diary. Of course, I would still have time "to strengthen the emotional side of my nature". Only there was not a minute to lose.

Hurry! Emergency! I would write poems, sing songs, dance dances, laugh myself silly, and cheer everybody up myself included. Particularly as I was theoretically familiar with all these subtleties and needed only to switch from words to deeds. That was all! And everything would be fine! I got out an exercise book for the poems and songs. Then I had a brilliant idea! I would sing my own songs to my own music. I would sing a song about my heart, my heart that always sticks to a steady

fifty-two beats per minute, in all situations, particularly as the heart is a hollow conical organ. The dilated superior part of the heart is called the base. The narrow inferior anterior part is called the apex. The heart lies behind the breastbone, slightly to the left. And so on and so forth.

Now a word about strengthening my ESOMYN!

Only how was I going to strengthen it, the Emotional Side Of My Nature, if the singing teacher had told me not to show my face again in the class? Never mind. She would apologise and beg me to attend her class again. By the way I would have to draft the memoir that the singing teacher was going to write about my singing. Oh, never mind, I could do that later on, after the singing lesson.

I could just imagine the faces of those Nonworgravys when I appeared at the lesson of my own free will! They wouldn't realise that I was engaging in this dubious enterprise to try and revive as quickly as possible the brain cells that had ignored art for so long.

How could my super-organism have overlooked this, apparently, on the genetic level? I had somehow never thought about what my parents had given me and whether or not they had given me anything emotional. When I was a child, an infant, that is, had they sung me lullabies (I couldn't remember) or played any musical instrument? The balalaika? The mandoline? The guitar? Or at least the piano?

It was with these thoughts that I entered the dining room. Father was working on his thesis. Mother was knitting. I broached the subject in a composed, roundabout way.

"When babies are going to sleep, people often sing them lullabies... Did you ever sing me a lullaby?"

"No," said mother.

"What about you, father?"

"There was no point. You slept like a log without that..."

"Like a log all right. I slept then, and now I am like a log. That's why the circle doesn't join up."

"What circle? Why doesn't it join up?" Father took off his glasses, wiped the bridge and asked: "And why should it join up anyway?"

"Because ... because there are toddler-singers in America. Haven't you heard about them?"

"What toddler-singers?" my parents asked in amazement.

"A boy of eighteen months started to sing folk songs, and a girl of fourteen months sang lullabies. Why do you think they did that?"

Father and mother exchanged glances and shrugged their shoulders in unison.

"Because their mothers and fathers sang them lullabies and folk songs. But some parents don't sing..."

"Some sing, others just rock their children to sleep," said father. "Whatever they feel like. Your mother and I didn't sing, because neither of us can. And you take after us. You can't sing either."

"I beg your pardon," I said decisively. "The reason I don't sing is because I thought that I shouldn't, but now that I know I must..." I stressed the word "must". "Now I do sing."

"Well, I wouldn't like to hear it. Although you're capable of anything. But why must you sing?"

I turned a deaf ear to that question, of course.

"Yes," I hinted. "But there are also parents who not only don't try to sing themselves, but don't try to pass on their inconsiderable musical abilities to their child, thereby not helping to strengthen the emotional side of their child's nature..."

At the words "thereby not helping to strengthen the emotional side of their child's nature", father's hand began to fidget nervily, but I continued notwithstanding.

"And some parents don't like singing or telling jokes... Incidentally, talking of jokes. A fat woman decided to diet and asked her doctor for advice. The doctor told her to touch the tips of her slippers twenty times every morning. After a while she came back to the doctor and complained that his advice hadn't worked. He asked her to tell him how she had carried it out. It turned out that every morning without getting up she had simply put her slippers on a chair by her bed and touched them—more than twenty times, but all to no avail!"

"So what about it?" asked father. "What about her touching her slippers twenty times?"

"What about it?" I asked in amazement. "It's funny."

"What's funny?" asked father.

"What's funny?" I exclaimed and decided to explain to father what was funny about the story: the doctor tells the woman to bend over and touch the tips of her slippers keeping her legs straight, but she touches them without the slightest effort by putting them on a chair.

"But what's funny about that?" father asked me once more. "Can you see anything funny about it? I would say it's sad rather than funny."

"But if Yuri says it's funny, then it must be funny. He knows more about humour than you and I," said mother.

"Now then, don't argue," I pacified my parents. "I'll try you with another one. A boy tells his father that the teacher said gravity keeps people on the ground. His father confirms that this is so. Then the boy asks him how people managed before this law was discovered."

Father gave me a bewildered look.

"So my genes lack not only an ear for music, but also a sense of humour."

"What Jean is that?" asked father.

"A mutual friend," I hinted.

"I don't know any Jeans you know!"

"Do you think it's right that there is no guitar, balalaika or piano in the house?" I asked.

"We'll get them all tomorrow," said mother.

"Tomorrow's not the same as today," I said. "How about a sing-song," I suggested. "Having fun and telling jokes?"

"That's the last straw!" father exclaimed angrily. "I'll tell you a funny story about joking and singing. A boy who's doing badly at school shows his marks-book to his father. The father sees that his son has bad marks for everything except singing. He looks at the boy and says: 'What is there to sing about?'"

"That's funny," I said seriously. "Alright, if that's the way things are we can't wait for nature to bestow her favours, we must wrestle them from her ourselves!" So saying I got up and left the room.

I could borrow a guitar today from Kolesnikov so as to get in touch with my genes straightaway. A gene can make itself heard from the very depth of your being, or you can cheer up your genes, tickle them under their arm-pits (genes do have molecular arm-pits) and teach them to sing.

I could teach my genes to sing, of course, but ... but the plan, the whole plan of my super-cosmic life would have to be reorganised, and where would I get the time? Where would I get the time?

Thinking about this, I climbed over the partition on our balcony and walked across Kolesnikov-Wryneck's balcony into his room. Kolesnikov was already asleep. I woke him up and asked:

"Have you got a guitar?"

"Yes," said Kolesnikov.

"Let's have it."

Kolesnikov handed me the guitar and said:

"The rumpus there was at the staff meeting yesterday because of you. They discussed that fire business, and your behaviour, and they called you a phenomenon. What does the Ivanov phenomenon teach us? It teaches us that your latest prank caused a fire at a rehearsal and you should be thrown out of the school. That's what the singing teacher said. The chemistry teacher said: 'I think the Ivanov phenomenon teaches us something else: for all his monstrous and inexplicable pranks Ivanov the phenomenon both learns from us, teachers, and teaches us a thing or two. Perhaps we, teachers, should follow his example and both teach and learn.' What an uproar this produced! Everybody was furious: 'We won't learn from him! We won't!' I'll write it all down in my new memoirs about you, okay?"

"Okay," I said, climbing out of the window with the guitar and across the balcony onto a ledge. "Have you got any other musical instruments?"

"Yes," said Kolesnikov. "A piano."

"Sit down and play at once, Kolesnikov. Or it will be too late. Not too late for me, but too late for you."

I paused on the ledge, looked at Kolesnikov and asked:

"What if the poems were sent to me from up there?" I looked up at the sky. "Some inhabitant of another planet sees that I am going to be entrusted with the greatest mission on earth ... and he's signalling to me. Perhaps they don't have any prose and only speak in verse all the time. And I've chosen a circle for my ex-libris... Listen to me now, Kolesnikov, and you'll understand later."

So saying I walked along the ledge, reached my balcony, climbed over the rail and went into my room. Then I simulated a triple exposure in my brain and began to do three things at once accordingly.

A triple exposure is when three different subjects are filmed on the same film. I looked at the Moscow night sky through a telescope and leaned on the guitar, picking out some chords with my left hand on the finger-board and quietly strumming the strings with my right. Then I started singing with one twenty-sixth of my voice.

A little later the door opened quietly, and my father's terror-stricken face appeared in the doorway.

"What's going on in here? What's the matter?"

"Walking down Peterskaya..." I sang. "Listen now, understand later!"

"Have you gone mad! You'll wake everybody up!" shouted father. "This is the last straw!"

"Try to understand, father," I said. "You can't imagine how important it is for me that the circle should join up, because a circle that doesn't join up isn't a circle at all, and because you should, you must understand that all artistic works consist of two components: the informational, which means words, tune and representation, and the rhythmical, which is most clearly expressed in music and dance."

"Stop, stop, this is the last straw. I can't stand it any longer," father repeated.

Father went into the hall, pulled on his mack and hurried out of the flat, forgetting to close the door. Mother, who had been watching this scene in silence, ran onto the landing after him and shouted:

"Perhaps you don't understand and you're asking your son to do something he thinks is pointless. In that case Yuri's obstinacy, a nervous symptom perhaps, may be the first sign of somewhat clumsily expressed independence. And the thing to do is not to run away, but to..."

But father was already outside and did not hear mother's words which, as always, contained a larger grain of truth than my father's actions.

When I went back to my room a piece of paper with a poem on it had appeared from nowhere and was lying on my desk. For the first time in my life, without showing it, of course, I was glad to see a poem. This is what it said.

TEST BY FLAG

*In front our Flag did boldly fly
While to destroy it the foe sought.
But bullet-pierced it led the fray,
From cloth the strongest was it wrought.*

*Our forbears left us one behest.
They cherished flags upon their chest.
To march behind the flag, you see,
That is the test of bravery.
The bold march out in front, like flags.*

*O'er building site, o'er mountain top
It flies, o'er mast and sea.
A precious relic borne aloft,
Forever with you and me.*

*The Flag our strength tests, yours and mine.
It guides us surely on forever
In work or battle bids stand firm.
And by it we do take our measure.*

*Our forbears left us one behest.
They cherished flags upon their chest.
To march behind the flag, you see,
That is the test of bravery.
The bold march out in front, like flags.*

Memoir Eighteen

A SUPER-HARD SUPER-LANDING

A cold rain had been falling all morning. I lay on the ground in a remote corner of Izmailovsky Park thinking about genetic surprises. A genetic surprise means a special type of organism. People who are not prone to catch cold and who like swimming in icy water are called "walruses". I was the super-walrus to end all walruses, of course. Having lain on the ground for two hours in the rain, I ran home for my satchel and Kolesnikov's guitar, just before the singing lesson. I changed quickly and appeared in the class-room with the guitar under my arm. Then I sat down at my desk, began to analyse my actions in the changing conditions of my external environment and came to the conclusion that I must do something about the emotional side of my nature. Who knows, perhaps tomorrow I would suddenly get an express telegram from the planet of Nonplusultra like a bolt from the blue, saying: "Departure imminent. Kindly meet us!" There would be panic on all sides. Who was to meet them? Then like a voice from the blue: "Let it be Yuri Ivanov!" And jerks like Maslov would cry: "Why Yuri Ivanov?" And the answer would be: "Because... Because he knows everything! And can do everything!"

That would be if they came tomorrow. But what if we went to visit them in several years' time? Who would go then? Me, of course! Ivanov! Only yesterday Maslov would have cried: "Why Ivanov? He's a super-cosmonaut, I know, and even a super-person, but he's not perfect. The ends of his circle don't join up. He doesn't like the arts or know anything

about them. You couldn't even have a nice space sing-song with him after dinner."

Now I know all there is to know about singing, I'll show that Maslov and Botov (he's our best soloist) how to sing! With a voice as strong as mine I could sing for a whole boys' choir, accompanied or *a capella* (*a capella* means singing unaccompanied.)

Before singing I will make a small speech to the effect that a person must be a complete individual and possess all the inner qualities in order to perform his social and spiritual functions, just as his body must possess all the organs to carry out its physical functions properly. Unfortunately, however, our concern for the body is far stronger than our concern for the mind. A person with one leg shorter than the other is an object of pity, for example, but a person lacking in intellect and void of ideals is not, although the latter defect is far more serious and dangerous both for the person who has it and for those who suffer because of him.

And to those who have suffered because of me up to now I shall say: forgive me! And I shall also say or, rather, hint that: "Hear my words, you nations. Man is master of the planet. He is a complete collection of natural inventions, COCONIN-ONE's the abbreviation!" And then I shall develop this idea to the effect that in the future each person will sing not only in his human voice, but also in the voices of all birds, even the most rare ones.

When the singing teacher came into the class-room and saw me, her face got kind of all distorted along the horizontal and the vertical, as they say on the telly.

"What are you doing here, Ivanov?" she asked me.

"I'm going to sing, Agrippina Mikhailovna."

Agrippina Mikhailovna shook her head in total disbelief, went up to the piano and said:

"You all remember the myth about Orpheus, don't you? When Orpheus played his lyre and sang the wild beasts stopped fighting and grew peaceful. Even the sea became calm, and the trees and cliffs moved closer to listen. Where the sword was powerless, Orpheus' singing wrought miracles.

"In Shakespeare's tragedy *Julius Caesar* when Brutus wants to emphasise Caesar's inferiority as a human being he exclaims:

...he hears no music;

Seldom he smiles, and smiles in such a sort

As if he mock'd himself, and scorn'd his spirit...

"The following lines are also Shakespeare's:

*The man that hath not music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils...
Let no such man be trusted.*

"But why turn to Shakespeare to prove yet again the vital role of music for the development of the human personality. It's obvious to everyone without that. Now who can tell me what the parts of a musical work are called?"

There was a long, painful silence in the class-room. As usual I was the first to say something.

"On your marks," I said, clearing my throat, and continued: "All works of art, musical ones included, consist of two components: the informational, to which words, melody and representation belong, and the rhythmical, which is most vividly expressed in music and dancing, but is evidently also present in painting, architecture and drawing. It is the rhythmical component, the 'inner rhythm' of a work, that creates the background for receiving all the information in it and that strengthens its specific emotional colouring. But now," I continued, "allow me to move from ordinary language to the language of music itself and sing you a little song entitled 'Heart-52'. The music and words are by me. I shall explain. 'Heart-52' is a song about a heart that never contracts more than fifty-two times a minute in any situation. So much for the heart, now about the music: the language of music is understood by all peoples and possesses great power to move us. But whereas people learn ordinary speech almost from the cradle, this is unfortunately not the case with musical 'speech'. Yet the earlier a person learns to understand and love music, the more receptive he will be to the art of music throughout his life."

"Why don't you just sing, Ivanov," said Botov. "Go on. Stop talking and get on with it..."

I was deliberately taking my time, of course, because all of them, Botov in particular, were quite good at music and singing, and Maslov couldn't wait to hear me open my mouth.

"Ivanov's going to sing," said someone in the choir.

"No, he isn't," someone else disagreed with him.

The noise level rose. All this time Agrippina Mikhailovna had been clutching her heart and staring at me anxiously.

"Just so that none of you should wonder how and why Ivanov suddenly started singing, I'll tell you. He ate a lot of lettuce. Let me explain. The Norwegian scientist Professor Olaf Lindström studies the effect of vegetables on the human psyche. According to him, lettuce develops musicality, pureed onion logical thinking, carrot and spinach produce melancholia and potato has a tranquillising effect. So choosing vegetables for lunch is not as simple as it seems. And now, especially for Boris Kuttyrev, who is such a jolly fellow... A team of scientists visited the coast of Sri Lanka where a strange phenomenon had been noticed as far back as the nineteenth century: on light evenings faint sounds seemed to rise out of the water and float from one end of the lagoon to the other. The team had brought photographic apparatus with telescopic lenses and powerful flash bulbs, tape recorders, sonic depth finders and other electronic apparatus. This helped them to solve once and for all the mystery of the strange music. The singers turned out to be tropical shallow water molluscs. The sounds have a very prosaic cause—they help the molluscs to digest food they have just swallowed. A joke," I said, "but every joke contains a grain of truth."

"If Ivanov really does sing a song with his own words and music, I shall die of amazement," said Nina Tyomkina.

"Then in order to prolong Tyomkina's life a little longer, I shall say a word about breathing during singing. 'The whole art of singing is based on the ability to inhale sufficient air and use it correctly and economically,' as Caruso said. And the voice, as we know, is produced by the interaction of vibrating vocal chords when a flow of air passes over their closed edges. If there is no flow of air, no sounds are produced, in spite of the fact that, according to Yusson's theory, the vocal chords can vibrate even without the air. So the role of a singer's respiratory system—the lungs and numerous muscles—is rightly compared to that of bellows for musical instruments, in other words, it is the voice's power system..."

"Let's have an air flow from you, Ivanov!" came a voice from the choir.

After this I cut short my lecture, filled my super-lungs with air, put my fingers on the guitar strings, and formed a mental picture of the chords accompanying the song, the position of my fingers on the finger-board, and the text of the song about the heart based on the theory of

versification that had gripped my prosaic imagination since yesterday evening. But ... what was this? What was the matter? Instead of poetry I saw the same prose passage with the words: the heart is a hollow conical organ. The dilated superior part is called the base. The narrow inferior section is called the apex. The heart lies behind the breastbone, slightly to the left. But it was impossible to sing a song to these words, although I knew that the sensation produced by the vibration of air on our hearing is called sound. The only material for music is musical sounds, that is, sounds that have a certain length, strength, and timbre and are made by the human voice or a musical instrument. I couldn't produce a single sound. There was an ominous silence in the music room. "In for a penny!" I thought. "Here goes." And I began to sing with all the power of my multi-decibel voice.

I sang to the words that the heart is a hollow conical organ and that the dilated superior part is called the base, etc. Although neither my voice nor my fingers would obey me, I went on singing with all my might. The prose words got all muddled in my brain, disobeying me and absolutely refusing to turn into poetry. Although the indicator arrow of my consciousness was swinging about wildly, I retained an outer composure. My pulse (I managed to put two fingers on my wrist) was steady as usual, fifty-two beats per minute.

What did I want to write a song about? A heart! A heart that beats... Beats like a ... like a what? Like a metronome! But a metronome is an instrument for beating out rhythmic particles of time. A heart beats like a ... like a clock. But a clock is an instrument for measuring time accurately... And "beat" is a verb. But what did it matter that "beat" was a verb, that a metronome was an instrument and a clock was a clock... Or that everyone was making an awful racket and didn't understand how I could keep so calm...

"Where are you? Where are you, brothers of the mind? They would have understood me now, not like these brothers of the song," I thought.

More than fifty years ago physicists discovered a most interesting natural phenomenon, namely that our planet is constantly being "bombarded" by a stream of high energy atomic particles from space. It is so strong, that the particles not only enter all living matter, but can also penetrate a fairly thick layer of lead and go hundreds of meters below the ground.

Interest in these envoys from outer space was by no means idle. One such particle alone is capable of destroying fifteen thousand human cells. Compared with the total number of cells—thousands of billions—this is



not much, but perhaps these particles had put my musical cells out of action? No, that was nonsense. They hadn't put anything out of action in anyone else. And Ivan Petrovich Pavlov was right when he wrote that "the strongest irritants are those that come from people. Our whole life consists of difficult relations with other people, and this can be most painful". People would have to be alone for a long time with space ... with one another. A cramped, strange setting and isolation. How could you avoid relationships that might be "most painful" then? This isn't outer space, and look what happens here. Complete lack of understanding.

In the music room my class-mates were in a state of panic, stress, but I kept calm, although nothing would obey me—not my voice, nor my fingers, nor the poetry, nor...

What they regarded, as usual, as my insolence, my desire to disrupt the lesson, my ... goodness only knows what, was actually something quite different. It was merely that one of my systems (my neglected systems, according to Charles Darwin) had broken down, and everything that I did (straining my voice, trying to make my fingers obey me and to turn the prose passage about my heart into rhyme), was merely an attempt to rectify the matter.

A super-paradoxical situation had arisen: I knew how to do something, but I couldn't actually do it.

It was as if a driver sat down at the wheel of a car, switched on the ignition and put his foot on the clutch, and instead of the engine revving up the radio started playing. My knowledge of the principles of scientific creativity had clashed head on with the principles of artistic creativity; I knew both inside out, but if I knew how to get a square root, I could get it, whereas if I knew how to write iambic verse, this did not mean that I actually could write it...

As I sang I had the sensation that I was flying to an unknown planet to carry out a super-difficult super-mission. All my instruments had failed, and now I was making the most super-hard super-landing, in which only one system would suffer, and not even suffer, but somehow ... not work properly!

No, not all the systems of my super-organism had failed... But this indecipherable language of art... These hieroglyphs of singing and poetry writing... Surely I would be able to decipher them. Surely my father was not right, in saying that I had never had a good ear for music and I never would? Surely Charles Darwin could not be right in that it was too late for me to revive my brain cells that dealt with art?

As a rule people without an ear for music never do get one. But there are exceptions to every rule. So I would try to be an exception! Being an exception was probably very difficult, but when had things ever been easy for me?

I would have gone on chanting, if I had not been thrown out literally by the whole choir in the middle of my catastrophic singing and poetry writing. For the first time in my life I was thrown out of the class in calm bewilderment and bewildered calm, concerned above all not at being thrown out but at what was going on in my all-knowing head that knew nothing at all. "Information received, but not decoded and therefore not processed..." I thought, listening to the indignant uproar in the class-room behind me. I also thought that by being able to sing and play the piano my class-mates were stronger than me, but not for long, of course, not for long...

Memoir Nineteen

QUICK MARCH TO THE MEDICAL CHECK-UP

Some sensitive person might have said that it was my unlucky day. But we super-cosmonauts don't regard days as being lucky or unlucky. I simply sweated a bit more than usual, that was all. Used up more calories. It couldn't possibly mean that I wouldn't master this singing business in the end. I played some chords with stiff fingers and began singing. The doorbell rang.

I opened the door and there on the landing was my class, almost the whole lot of them. In front stood Kutyrev and Maslov. I was about to close it again, but one of the boys stuck his foot out and the others grabbed hold of the door. They all crowded into the dining room.

"They've got dirty shoes on!" cried mother in horror.

"Take your shoes off, everyone!" ordered Maslov.

"What's going on?" asked father in amazement.

"As if it wasn't enough to... Out you go at once," said mother.

"We've come to see you on account of your Yuri," said Maslov.

"No accounts! Out you go at once! Yuri is writing poetry and composing music," mother cut him short.

"Begging your pardon, but writing poems and composing music is pointless if you don't have the talent," said Andrei Kubyshev.

"Begging your pardon," mother pounced on Andrei Kubyshev. "The reason why Yuri doesn't have an ear for music is probably because he has never wanted to have one, and the reason why he was not talented as a poet was probably because he didn't see the need to be either!"

That was the answer! I agreed with mother entirely. And issued an order to myself straightaway: "To Y. E. Ivanov, get talented as quickly as possible, and that's that! Full stop! And no messing about!"

"Do you know that he ruined our singing lesson?" Victor Maslov asked mother. "With his so-called ear for music and poetic talent. And he gave our nice teacher a heart attack!"

After these words the whole class roared out together:

"We've come to inform you officially that we've had enough! We can't stand it anymore. It must stop. Our patience is exhausted!"

"Your whole class used to attack my son at school, and now you're doing it at his home! Go away!" said mother.

"Don't go away! Put on your shoes and don't go away!" shouted father.

"What's that? Then it's either me or ... or these ... what do you call them!" said mother.

"Either or! Well, today it will be or! Come into my room! Come along, all of you!" said father. "Aren't you going out? Your so-called help will only make things worse for your son today," father laid special emphasis on the words "so-called help".

Father and mother argued for a bit,

until mother's voice said firmly:

"Fortunately for you I am going out!"

After that the front door banged loudly.

I heard the boys and girls shuffle into father's room, the whole class, their shoes clomping noisily, as they took with them museum-piece chairs from the dining room that were never used and had covers on them.

"Take off the covers!" ordered father.

"You come too, Ivanov," said Maslov. "We've got no secrets from you. You're the one who has secrets from us!"

He knocked on the door of my room and waited.

I was sitting at the piano, looking with my left eye at the white and black keys. The piano sounded marvellous even without music: perfect octave, augmented octave, diminished octave, first octave, second octave, third octave, fourth octave, fifth octave. With my right eye I looked at the finger-board of the guitar, repeating the instructions to myself: "To tune the instrument, take a tuning-fork that produces the sound 'doh'

in the first octave. This corresponds to the first sound (the sound of the first thinnest string on the guitar), when it is tightened on the seventh fret; open (untightened) it produces the sound 're'. The second string, when tightened on the third fret, should sound like the first open..." I was about to strike the keys, when father yelled from his room in a hypnotist's voice:

"Come out!"

"Of course I'll come out, only wait three minutes, please," I said, opening the door.

"Why three minutes?" asked Maslov.

I didn't want to go on with this disobedient music while my classmates were there.

"Because I've got to polish the floor for three minutes now," I replied.

Since everyone at home and from my class knew there was no point in arguing with me, nobody, not even father, made the slightest objection. I returned to my room, fixed two brushes to my feet, turned on the tape-recorder with some music and glided about the floor. Repeating the words of the song after the singer, I performed various dancing steps on the pretext of polishing the floor. The boys and girls crowded in the doorway, watching me and making remarks.

"Ivanov's not polishing the floor. I think he's dancing."

"And singing..."

"He ruined the singing lesson and now he's singing!"

"Golovanova and Granina. Write that down as another symptom: suddenly started singing and dancing."

The three minutes were up. Having strengthened the emotional side of my nature somewhat by dancing, I removed the brushes from my feet, turned off the tape-recorder and went into father's room accompanied by the kids from our class.

Nobody dared to start the conversation at first, and I didn't like that. Cowards! Nonworgravys! Sitting on their chairs like that! Full of their own importance! Who was the bravest? Say something! I thought Maslov would begin first out of spite! But to my surprise it was Golovanova who started.

"Evgeny Alexandrovich," she said. "I'll tell you everything straight without any beating about the bush. Maybe it's not very tactful, but cruel and even heartless. After all, you are Ivanov's father. At first we thought your son Yuri just had a complex character. Then we thought he... Actually we invented several explanations. We thought about it and

discussed it for a whole month. And we've even passed a resolution. On Yuri Ivanov. Resolved 'to consider the final explanation as correct. Unanimous! Almost unanimous, that is. There were two abstentions and one vote against. Vanya Zaitsev voted against. Zaitsev is against the last explanation and the last but one. Get up, Zaitsev!"

Zaitsev got up and said:

"The last explanation is crazy, and the last but one is nuts. The last but one just tries to shift the blame."

"We have rejected the last but one explanation too," said Vera Granina. "I'd just like to tell you how we arrived at it. It's rather embarrassing to talk about, but I'll tell you all the same. We were sitting and wondering about the diagnosis... Please forgive us for the diagnosis. Liuda and I are keen on medicine and we think, er... Liuda, you tell them what you thought..."

"I'll tell you straight as someone who wants to be a doctor," said Liuda Golovanova. "I have been observing your son from the medical point of view for some time. I have even compiled a case history of Y. Ivanov's disease, for practice, of course. I've got the symptoms written down here."

"I see," said father. "And what is the diagnosis?"

"Written down here," Liuda repeated. "Irritation of an endogenic and reactive nature plus unexpected bouts of temporary insanity, plus muttering and shouting of words that do not exist in any language, such as, 'Nonworgravy' and 'Worgravy' and so on, which together mean ... bonk..."

"What bonk?" father asked.

"That he's bonkers ... oh, excuse me ... to use medical language he's insane..."

"Up the creek, she means!" said one of the boys behind me.

"Did you ever suffer from nervous diseases as a child?" Vera asked my father.

"No," said father, looking at me sadly.

"And what about Yuri?"

"He was never ill when I was here," said father. "But I was often away for long periods on business. I'm an auditor... Maybe he was ill when I was away?"

"Did you suffer from nervous diseases as a child, Ivanov?" Liuda Golovanova asked me.

"I've never been ill in my life," I said.

"That's also a symptom," said Golovanova. "They're always saying how healthy they are..."

"Who is?" father asked her.

"Oh, they..." Golovanova replied.

"I didn't agree with that diagnosis even then," said Zaitsev suddenly. "And I don't now. If you ask me, Ivanov isn't mad at all, he's just a common-or-garden genius... He may be my enemy, but I'll still say that about him: he and I have had three fights..."

"Four," I corrected him.

"Four," Zaitsev agreed. "Three because I touched his satchel, and the fourth because of a book—I wanted to look at the picture in a book called *Mrs Bark's Doll*... But I still think Ivanov is a remarkable, even outstanding personality with a will of iron, a most unusual character..."

"He's a character alright!" cried Granina.

"That Zaitsev is a really good judge of people!" I thought. "Not like the rest of them."

"But he's ghastly!" said Filimonova.

"So what?" Zaitsev replied. "There are nice outstanding personalities, but Ivanov just happens to be a nasty one."

"Stick to what he's actually done," said Maslov.

"I'm just getting to that... Atoms of iron-57, as you may know, exist in two forms. There are charged, radioactive atoms that emit gamma rays, and there are normal, non-charged iron atoms. I think Ivanov is a charged, active person."

"You're right about that," Maslov agreed. "Only Ivanov's charge and activity are too much for everyone else."

"Because what has taken place in Yuri Ivanov's head is an information explosion. Unfortunately this explosion is uncontrollable. That's why so many people have been hurt by it," said Zaitsev.

An uproar ensued. It was impossible to make out who was saying what. All you could hear was: "An information explosion has taken place in his head! And bits are flying out of him." "An explosion! Did you hear that?" "Yes! Those bits of information have been flying around for almost three weeks now." "Has anyone been wounded by them? The wounded are healthy."

"All those wounded by the information explosion in Ivanov's head kindly come forward!"

"He said to me 'When you look at me your eyes go all big. You should get your thyroid examined.' That's what he said!"

"He's cruel to people. He's always saying: 'I'd throw you all to the piranhas at low water!'"

"And swearing in some strange language."

"He's big-headed..."

"A real know-all," said Lena Marchenko. "Thinks he knows everything, and everybody else knows nothing. Fancies himself as some kind of super-man..."

"That's all rubbish," said Golovanova, addressing my father. "Our latest diagnosis is that Yuri Ivanov is not Yuri Ivanov at all. In other words, your son is not your son."

"Then who is he?" father asked.

"He's a visitor from another planet. They've kidnapped your son, and put a double in his place! Maybe our brothers of the mind have such a highly developed technology that they can create a person's double, or maybe these brothers are not so brotherly after all and not so mindful either, judging by Yuri Ivanov. I mean judging by his behaviour, not by his mind, and perhaps on their planet everyone behaves like that! So we," Golovanova continued, "suggest that Yuri be given a medical check-up tomorrow as a matter of urgency! If you don't object, of course... Vera's father is a professor of psychology. He treats cosmonauts. He has agreed to do all the tests, such as blood tests that will explain everything to us."

"I don't object to a medical check-up," said father. "But my son has already put a hypnotist to sleep, so I'm afraid he might do something to a cosmonauts' doctor."

"Are you willing to have a medical check-up, Ivanov?"

"As many as you like!" I said loudly, even joyfully. I couldn't have thought of a better present than a medical check-up. It was time I did a practical course of psychology with a good professor. Now I had a good pretext for this *piece of training*. I had been wondering how to find a professor who specialised in cosmonauts, and now he had practically knocked on my door.

"Tomorrow then," said Golovanova. "I've written it down here."

"Only remember that tomorrow from 15.00 to 16.00 I'm scheduled to... I shall be busy."

The boys and all the girls exchanged meaningful glances, whispered to one another and then whispered to my father. Golovanova said:

"Alright, Ivanov, alright. The professor stops receiving patients at four o'clock, so you can go and see him just after four, Ivanov."

"Only promise, Ivanov ... Yuri!" said father in a low voice. "Promise in front of everyone that you will go."

"I promise," I said.

"Write down the address of the polyclinic," said Golovanova. "Number..."

But I was not destined to get the address of the polyclinic at that particular moment. Golovanova's voice was drowned by a deafening explosion and the sound of breaking glass somewhere in the region of the kitchen. Everyone shuddered to a man, except me, of course. A second later there was another explosion. Everyone shuddered again. I went on sitting calmly, but my heart sank apprehensively. Father jumped up and rushed out of the room. All the boys tore madly after him. I rose to my feet last of all and made my way unhurriedly to the kitchen.

Our kitchen, usually as spotless as an operating theatre, was a terrible sight. The ceiling, walls and cupboards were covered with red splotches. By some large jars on the gas-stove squashed black currants and bits of broken glass were floating in a puddle on the floor. In the middle of the kitchen was a bottle neck with a stopper in it.

"What's happened?" shouted father, seizing his head in his hands.

"Mother was bottling some fruit for winter," I said. "If someone hadn't put the bottles by the burner nothing would have happened. The heat made them ferment..." I added.

"Why do all these explosions have to happen in my home?" father shouted again.

I kept quiet. It was my business to explain the reason for this occurrence, not the motives behind the actions that produced it, although the explosions had been intended to train my nervous system not to react to sudden bangs.

"People make explosions and put bottles near gas burners in my home!" father collapsed onto a stool and howled as if he had tooth-ache.

"Well," said Golovanova in the corridor to the boys. "Now do you see what all these woggigravies and coconkins can do to a person?"

There was a loud clatter in the corridor.

"Listen, everyone!" father jumped up from the stool. "Couldn't we fix the medical check-up for today, please! At once! This very minute!"

"I'll ring daddy at the polyclinic now!" said Vera Granina, and she and father went out of the kitchen into the dining room.

The girls began clearing up in the kitchen. One of the boys tried the black currants and said: "Hey, they're good!" Somebody said: "They wouldn't have bottled them otherwise!" But I took no notice of all this.

I stood and looked danger in the eye, the danger that was threatening me, if I can be threatened by danger, that is. "It would be a good thing if the professor did find something unusual about me," I thought. Then my picture would appear in *Izvestia*—bang! "In connection with the safe landing and successful establishment of contact..." After our flight to Jupiter my crew and I would rest in the special house where the super-cosmonauts relax after their return. My cosmonauts would be examined by all sorts of academicians and corresponding members of the Academy of Medical Sciences, everyone except me, of course, because I would be in perfect health, as usual.

I would lie in a chair thinking. Suddenly Vera Granina's father would come into the room and say with a somewhat embarrassed smile:

"Don't you recognise me, Comrade Ivanov?"

"No, I don't," I would reply.

But I would only be pretending, of course.

"Surely you remember coming to me for a check-up when you were so high? And I assessed you as normal. Ha-ha-ha! But now it turns out that you are super-normal!"

I would laugh too, of course.

"Ha-ha-ha! Yes, professor, you didn't get to the bottom of me then. Ha-ha-ha! But you weren't the only one! Ha-ha-ha!"

"I certainly wasn't! My daughter also took you for a normal person. Ha-ha-ha!"

"So she did! Ha-ha-ha! By the way, where is she now? Ha-ha-ha!"

"Standing in the corridor. Too shy to come in... Ha-ha-ha!"

"Too shy, did you say? Ha-ha-ha! Oh, do ask her in. Go on! Ha-ha-ha! Ask her to come in!"

"Come into the dining room at once!" my father's voice ordered.

I went into the dining room.

"Put your coat on and quick march to the medical check-up!"

Everyone began getting into macs and jackets and pulling on caps and berets, when a girl from our class walked into the middle of the dining room and said loudly:

"There's no need for him to have a medical check-up."

"Why not?" asked father.

"What do you mean 'no need'? Why is there 'no need'?" everyone buzzed.

"There's no need for a doctor," this girl from our class insisted



stubbornly. I couldn't see who was talking because the boys were blocking my view.

"Who's that?" I asked Maslov, who was standing next to me.

"Who's that?" he repeated in amazement. "Tanya Topolyova from our class." Then he added: "You do need a medical check-up. She's the most beautiful Tanya in the world!"

"This is Yuri Ivanov's diary," said Tanya, lifting up my enciphered memoirs. "I realise, of course, that it's not nice to read other people's diaries, particularly if they're in code, not nice on your own and even less nice all together, but since we're talking about visitors from other planets and a cosmonauts' doctor who is to diagnose Yuri Ivanov, let this diary provide the diagnosis instead. It will tell us everything about Ivanov and diagnose him better than any doctor. First of all, it will tell us that Ivanov is not Ivanov at all, but Barankin. Your surname is Barankin, isn't it?" she asked my father.

"Yes," father said. "My surname is Barankin. But my son didn't like this surname and he decided to use his mother's surname at school... Have you heard of the book *Be a Man, Barankin!* When my son used this surname at school, everyone used to say to him: 'Be a man, Barankin, tell us how you turned into a sparrow, or a butterfly, or an ant.' So Yuri asked us to send him to another school and used his mother's surname."

"Now we know why he talked about ants before he took us on all those amusements in the park. Remember? 'The body of the largest ant is measured in cubic millimetres, but an ant-hill together with its underground section is hundreds of thousands of times bigger than its "builder"..."

"And why he explained to me about sparrows; 'it's not fair,' he said, 'that sparrows go barefoot winter and summer, but human beings'..." said Sergei Medov.

"And why he told me about butterflies. 'Are you friends with Olga Fomina, Maslov?' he said. 'Yes, I am,' I told him. 'How many kilometres away can you detect her presence?' 'I detect her when I see her,' I said. Then he said that butterflies can detect each other forty kilometres away."

At the moment when my real surname was being deciphered I was concerned not about that at all, but about the incomprehensible way my memoirs had fallen into the hands of a girl in our class, a girl I had never noticed before. While everyone was discussing noisily the fact that my real surname was Barankin, I looked hard at Tanya Topolyova and for the

first time saw her three-dimensional, how shall I put it, holographical form. Tanya Topolyova really was so beautiful that she reminded me of Diderot's saying: beauty is what arouses the idea of harmony in the mind. And also the mathematical idea of beauty: in beautiful lines one can always sense mathematical laws. So that was the cause of my super-secret information leak, beauty that arouses the idea of harmony in the mind, the exquisite lines of Tanya Topolyova's face in which one could detect a mathematical precision! That was why I hadn't noticed this idea of harmony and hadn't detected the mathematical precision, fool that I was. Fool indeed. For if I had noticed in time there might not have been any information leak at all. But how and why had the manuscripts I had given for safe-keeping to Stepanida Vassilievna ended up with Tanya Topolyova? On the one hand, there was an information leak, and on the other, a stream of poetry. A stream and a leak! I must thank Topolyova for the stream, and curse her for the leak. What was I to do with Topolyova? Curse her or thank her? First of all I had to decipher how she had deciphered the cipher. I could have found out straightaway, but I was scheduled to take part in a karting race in fifteen minutes time and I couldn't put that off. Yet nor could I put off investigating how my manuscript had got from the school keeper to Tanya Topolyova. The only way to do that was to keep everybody in our flat for another three hours or so, but how could I keep them all there, including Tanya Topolyova? There was one simple answer.

"Unfortunately I must go out now," I said. "I have no more secrets from you now. 'Listen now and understand later' is no longer valid. Our mutual understanding motto for today is 'listen now and understand now!' And as Comrade Topolyova has said in her far from mediocre verse: 'Then as you into battle ride your face, dear knight, you must not hide. That is the start of bravery!'"

I went out of the room with a feeling of sporting aggressiveness, the urge to strain my psychic and physical powers to the utmost to achieve high, even the highest (record) results.

Two hours later, as I sped up the stairs to my landing, I heard the familiar sound that I had left in the music room at school not so long ago. In a word, the stress was continuing. For a long time stress was thought to be a negative reaction (depression, nervous breakdown, etc.) by the organism to an irritant, until the author of the term, the American scientist Hans Selye discovered that stress can be bad (distress) or good (evstress) — joy, inspiration, etc.

Of those present almost all were in a state of distress, and only Tanya Topolyova's face showed clearly expressed evstress. "What's she so pleased about?" I wondered.

To be honest, as I looked at my class-mates' faces through the glass doors of the dining room, I continued to do two things at the same time: on the one hand, I listened to what they were saying about me and, on the other, I continued to marvel at the fact that I, who could calculate mentally, like a good mathematician, the root to the power of nineteen from a number with a hundred and thirty three digits could not write a poem about my heart!

"And he swears in a strange language."

"What, for example?" asked Tanya Topolyova.

"Well, for example..." Lena Marchenko stopped short. "I don't know whether I should really say it out loud? For example, sepaktakroi!" she said, bursting out laughing.

"Sepaktakroi is Malay for 'to play ball with your foot,'" said Tanya Topolyova.

"He's a misanthrope!" cried Lev Kirkinsky. "His favourite saying is 'I'd throw you all to the piranhas at low water!'"

"You're all crazy," said Tanya Topolyova. "The whole point is that at low water the river is very shallow. The piranhas don't touch anyone at this time. They sort of sleep. When the tide turns the level of the water rises, and you can't go in it, because that would mean certain death."

"Yes, but he always knows what the time is," shouted Kolesnikov.

I walked into the room, and there was a hush. Everyone looked at me, as if I really were double from another planet. By the way the hypnotist doctor and even Uncle Peter had somehow appeared among my class-mates.

"Go on, ask him what the time is," shouted Kolesnikov.

"What's the time, Yuri?" father asked me.

"Five thirty and twenty-three seconds," I replied without a moment's hesitation.

Everyone with a watch looked at it, and the hypnotist, after verifying that I was right, tutted and shrugged his shoulders.

"The most difficult thing in the world is to be in the same place as the fantastic Ivanov, who turns out not to be Ivanov at all, but the super-fantastic Yuri Barankin!" said Nina Kisina.

"Entrust him with meeting beings from other planets and he'd put our Earth on bad terms with whole galaxies!"

"Ask him whether he's that Barankin or not," cried Vera Granina.

"We all live and fly on the good spaceship Earth, don't we?" said Lev Kirinsky. "And the ship's crew should be compatible with one another, as adults and children."

"You ask him whether he's that Barankin or not," persisted Vera Granina.

"Einstein once said that no great discovery is worth more than the manifestation of humane qualities," shouted Maslov.

Then Alla Astakhova said:

"Academician Velikhov was asked to define modern man. And you know what he said? That modern man is capable of feeling responsible for everything that happens near or far away. And Barankin is the sort of person who couldn't care less what happens far away. He's only interested in what happens to him, around and inside him."

"You just ask him if he's that Barankin or not," persisted Vera Granina.

"No, I'm not that Barankin. I'm this Barankin," I said.

"What's this Barankin?" Kisina went on interrogating me.

I could not find a suitable reply to that question, but Tanya Topolyova replied for me.

"I can tell you what this Yuri Barankin is. I think he's the most fantastic of all the real ones and the most real of all the fantastic ones!" Then she added: "Do you know what sort of a person he is? There are people who test planes to see how they stand up to various loads, even crashes, but he, but he..." Tanya repeated. "But he..." she said a third time, "he trains himself to stand up to these loads, you see, and perhaps the crashes too..."

"Would you fly with Barankin to carry out a highly difficult mission?" asked Nina Kisina.

"No, I wouldn't," said Tanya. "I wouldn't fly with him, because Barankin's imagination is stronger than he is. I think he doesn't control his imagination, his imagination controls him."

Only then for some reason did I notice that our dining room had changed during my absence. It was covered with books and magazines. They lay piled up on the table and floor like a barricade from behind which I was being bombarded with single words and whole rounds of them. From the covers of books and magazines I was being observed by Pavlov,

Galileo, Gorky, Keppler, Lomonosov, Stanislavsky and so on. And the words that I had taken for boring edifying quotations, were actually not quotations at all, but simply statements by the scientists and thinkers in whose name they were uttered. "What a pity those scientists and thinkers are here as drawings and photographs," I thought. "Or they would be on this side of the barricade, my side, the side of the super-cosmonaut."

"You can tear up your memoirs and your log-book. And stop wasting time on your super-strict super-training for super-space super-flights. I don't understand it," said father, his voice rising higher and higher. "Why waste your time like this? Why train for something that will never happen! You'll never fly into space! Understand?"

For the first time in my life I heard my father yelling.

"Yes, I will!" I said loudly.

"No, you won't!"

"Why won't I?" I asked even louder.

"Because only very healthy people fly into space," my father rapped out. "And you're ill. Very ill!" He was saying something he really meant, without consulting a book.

If I were not a serious-minded person, I would just have laughed at this. You could say all sorts of things about me, but not that I wasn't healthy.

"You're seriously ill!" father continued. "Very seriously! And now we'll give you a diagnosis that won't make you feel any better." He began to rummage about in some books and magazines, repeating nervily: "No, that's not the one! Neither is that!"

"I wonder who father's looking for to help him now. What great authority? He's got almost the whole class as it is!"

"Ah, here we are!" said father, picking up a magazine from the table and opening it. He put on his glasses, glanced at me several times over the top of them, and began to read. "A few words about psychological incompatibility... (Pause.) For a long expedition it is exceptionally important to choose a team of people who will find it easy to live and work together. This is exceptionally important... (Pause.) It should suffice to recall an episode in the life of the famous polar explorer Fridtjof Nansen... (Pause.) He was a distinguished scientist with remarkable powers of perception... (Pause.) And great personal charm! (Pause.) A lecture which he once delivered in Edinburgh was called 'What We Do Not Write in Books'. It was about the famous drift of the *Fram*. Nansen talked about the navigator Johansen who was his great friend. Together they reached

the latitude of 86 degrees north, then turned back towards Franz Josef Land on the continent. The journey took them about eighteen months. They had nothing but walrus and polar bear meat to eat. They were practically on the verge of collapse. But the most difficult thing for them to tolerate was each other's company. If they did utter a few words to each other once a week, the mode of address was always 'Mister Chief Navigator' or 'Mister Head of the Expedition'. This was no mere whim or peevishness... (Pause.) It was a manifestation of the law of psychological in-com-pat-i-bility ... which the navigator Johansen illustrated perfectly!"

After this I was bombarded one by one or altogether with so many quotations on this subject intended to develop father's thesis, that I was forced to put my super-fingers over my super-ears.

"I should like to say something too," said Nina Kisina, looking out from behind a pile of books. "I should like to say what Cervantes once said," she babbled, leafing feverishly through some book or other. "To ... mmm ... to make an apple cake in thirty minutes, whip three eggs, add salt, vanilla, one glass of castor sugar and ten grammes of flour... Oh, wait a minute, I'm not reading the right bit..."

"No, you're not," I cut in. "And it's not ten grammes of flour, it's one glass of flour, or instead of a cake you'll get a..."

"But it says here that you need ten grammes of flour," said Nina.

"Well, it must be a printing error," I said. "Look at the back and see if there's a list of errata."

"Yes, it is a mistake," said Kisina, after consulting the slip of paper at the end of the book. "But everybody is right, Yuri," she continued. "And although you're a super-healthy person, you've got a disease that in cosmonauts is called ... personal psychological incompatibility... Of the third degree... In a serious and probably incurable form..."

"Ordinary cosmonauts have diseases like that, but not super-cosmonauts," I said. "Super-cosmonauts couldn't have it! Now listen, everybody, it's already seven fifty-two and thirteen seconds. Tomorrow I'm taking the entrance exams for three institutes at once: drama school, literature institute and the conservatoire. I've already passed the theory at an oral. As you yourselves realise, the circle must join up. So, there you are, dear cooks, dietologists and bakers of cakes called 'Yuri Barankin's Incompatibility'! Now about you not wanting to be in my crew and carry out my mission under my ... leadership... If you don't want to, others will!"

"Come on, everybody," ordered Maslov. "Time to go home! This

all-knowing and all-understanding person hasn't understood a thing."

Everyone began to leave the dining room carrying books under their arms and in their hands.

"I'm going too," said father. "I'm going to live with grandma. So you won't listen to your co-pupils," he muttered. "You won't listen to us, grown-ups, you won't listen to Gorky, or Stanislavsky, or Pavlov..."

Father slammed the door and I was left alone.

What a pity the human voice cannot (so far) say three different things at once. Unfortunately nature has not yet patented this ability in anyone, but if it had, I, alone at last in long-awaited solitude, would have said: "Puss, puss!" Then I would have chanted: "What were mistakenly called for many centuries the 'vibrations' of the vocal chords are not vibrations at all: they are simply a series of ultra-short and rapid contractions of the vocal chords." And declaimed: "My heart beats! My heart beats! Oh, how it beats!" I would have said all this at once, because when I am on my own my mind concentrates on a lot of problems. This time there were only three of them. Although, to be precise, and if one is to be anything, one must be precise, I could sense another problem, a fourth, namely conflict with my class-mates. True, this sensation was a personal, not a general one. "In fact everything that has happened is not a conflict, just a contradiction, and not every contradiction develops into a conflict," I thought, pacing the flat in search of Muska the cat in order to feed her.

Looking under the table in my search for Muska I saw a piece of punched card and a sheet of paper on the table-cloth. The paper said: "To Yuri Barankin from Tanya Topolyova." I picked up the paper, turned it over and began to read. "Yuri," I saw written in a firm hand. "I never thought things would come to this, but they have, this being a computer. During your conversation with us, or rather during the diagnosing of your illness, you probably decided that your incompatibility was only in relation to your class-mates, but in fact it is much worse than that. Much worse than we thought and you think. Before our conversation I managed with the assistance of a computer programmer to feed your psychological portrait into a computer. I do not need to tell you that psychology deals with the laws of development of man's psychic qualities: needs, interests, habits, abilities, temperament and character. It was this that led me to computer technology. We fed your psychological portrait into a

computer, and this is what the computer told us: that you, Barankin, are not compatible with a single cosmonaut in the whole world!" Signed: "Tanya Topolyova."

To be quite honest, I walked around the room a bit longer looking for Muska and trying not to think about Tanya's note, but my thoughts kept returning to the words: "At a speed of one million operations per second (the human brain is not yet capable of operating at such a speed) the computer has established your complete incompatibility with all the cosmonauts in the world." A kind of irresistible force drew me to these words. And perhaps for the first time in my super-cosmonaut life I did one thing only: I thought about the diagnosis. The computer had predicted total isolation for me in carrying out the most difficult mission on earth. The attraction, the attraction of two critical masses. Their drawing together and ... as Zaitsev had put it, that non-academician Zaitsev, an information explosion had taken place in Yuri Barankin's head, a misinformation explosion, and the life of the other thoughts in my head turned out to be short. As short as the life of the comet recently discovered by the Dane Richard West. The break-up of this cosmic wanderer was photographed for a month by astronomers in Kiev. The photographs showed clearly how the nucleus divided into four pieces, each about a kilometre in diameter. Surrounded by a cloud of gas that had formed during intense evaporation of the ice, the fragments of the heavenly body gradually flew off in different directions.

Thinking about West's comet, I just lay down on father's divan, regardless of my schedule, comrades of posterity, lay down stupidly, aimlessly, oblivious of the constant ticking of the biological clock within me. On the divan lay the magazines and books with the help of which father had intended with my class-mates to wage battle on me. I picked up a copy of *The Literary Gazette* that lay on top and glanced at the last page. I saw a cartoon, some stories, phrases and parodies... Then my eye alighted on a translation of a Danish poem called *Little Morning Joys*, and I read it aloud.

*How nice to wake up one spring morn
And have a stretch and have a yawn.
To gaze upon the sunbeams flickering
And hear the old clock's steady ticking
That's ticked the whole long night away.*

*And slowly off your slumber shake
And tell your body just awake
In tones that brook of no delay
"Time to get up and greet the day!"
Then go on lying there in bed.*

I repeated the words of the poem: "And slowly off your slumber shake and tell your body just awake in tones that brook of no delay 'Time to get up and greet the day!' Then go on lying there in bed." And I went on lying there in bed, although according to my schedule I should have been training.

Memoir Twenty

MY PULSE STARTS RACING!

Strangely enough next morning I woke up in bed. There was no one at home. Father must have carried me half-asleep to bed. After breakfast I didn't do any training either. At first I paced absentmindedly up and down the room, reciting out loud: "And slowly off your slumber shake and tell your body just awake in tones that brook of no delay 'Time to get up and greet the day!' Then go on lying there in bed."

With these words on my lips I went outside. In the street I stood aimlessly for a while at a tram stop, then got on a tram for some reason and went where the tram took me, right to the terminus which was called Mikhalkovo. Then I swam, sunbathed, went to the cinema, walked around and simply did nothing.

On the fourth or fifth day, I think it was, I met Tanya Topolyova. She came up to me and said:

"I forgot to give you back your memoirs," and handed me my exercise book in code.

I took the book and put it in my jacket pocket.

"How did you get hold of my memoirs?" I just couldn't understand that.

"Aunt Pasha gave them to me. She said: 'I live on the ground floor, and these look like very important documents... You live on the twelfth floor, so they'd be safer with you.'"

After that we stood there silently for a long time, then Tanya looked at the sky and said:

"The birds are flying away..."

Then she paused and added:

"Apparently they find their way by the sun, the stars and the earth's magnetic field." Then she paused again and added: "But I think we don't all need to know how and why birds find their way when they fly south. Let people who study bird migration know about that..."

I said nothing.

"Aren't you training these days?"

I said nothing.

"That's right," said Tanya. "Even the greatest cosmonauts don't train all the time..."

I said nothing.

Tanya also said nothing. We stood like that in silence for a long time. Then I asked her:

"Did you write the poems yourself?"

"Some of them," Tanya replied, "and some I borrowed from my father. He's a poet. He's got a friend who's an actor, you've probably seen him on television. The two of them wanted to write a play, but it didn't work out, and the poems were left over. Still they came in useful, as you can see."

"So they did," I agreed.

Then Tanya nodded to me and set off down the avenue. For some reason I followed her.

Tanya Topolyova and I wandered around the park for a long time. At first I hadn't got the courage, but then I said:

"I have written a poem about the heart, after all. Would you like me to read it to you?"

Tanya was delighted.

So I read it to her.

*Many poems, many ballads
Have about the heart been penned.
In them all through fear and danger
It beats bravely like a drum.
Like a battle drum.*

*Ogaryov was friends with Herzen
And their friendship it was dear.
Their two hearts did beat together
Beat as one for all to hear,
Like a battle drum.*

*When a person's cruel to others
People say he has no heart.
When a child is born its heartbeat
Is felt strongly from the start,
Like a battle drum.*

*You don't rev it like an engine,
You don't fuel it like a plant.
Yet it beats on, never flagging,
Never faltering, strong and hard,
Like a battle drum.*

*And even should the heart bleed
It will never leave the fray,
For it has but one goal only
And that is to win the day,
Like a battle drum.
Yes, it beats,
The heart beats
Like a battle drum.*

When I finished reading the poem something funny happened to me: my mouth got dry, I turned pale and my arms and legs went all funny. I even had to cling onto the fence so as not to fall down.

"What's the matter?" asked Tanya Topolyova in alarm.

"I don't know," I said.

Tanya took my hand, held it in hers and said quietly:

"Your pulse has quickened!" She counted and said: "A hundred beats a minute! It's racing!" she said. "At last! At last your pulse is racing!" I listened to my quickening heart-beat, my biological clock and said:

"How many ... how many days is it?"

"About five," said Tanya Topolyova.

"Phew!" I said.

"Does what is written on your face mean you've lost a lot of time?" asked Tanya Topolyova.

"No," I said. "What should be written on my face is that I've found a lot of time! Even my face has stopped obeying me."

"Please try and find another two or three days," said Tanya.

"Then what?"

"Then you can start training! Okay?"

"Okay!" I said, looking at the sky, at where some day someone would perform the most difficult mission in the whole Universe!

Looking at the stars, the day stars that seemed not to be there in the sky, but actually were...

"By the way," I said. "You wrote in your poem that..." And I recited quietly: "One love-sick lad is dreaming of blue eyes on earth afar..."

"The guitar makes him remember on Yubis, the far-away star," Tanya continued quietly.

"But there isn't such a star," I said. "I know all the stars in the sky. There isn't one called Yubis."

"No," Tanya agreed. "But there will be ... because it's your star... What do you think it means?" After that Tanya fell silent.

I don't know how long she would have been silent if I hadn't asked her:

"What does Yubis mean?"

"It's the Yuri Barankin Star," said Tanya quietly. "A super-new one!" Tanya's lips went on mouthing the words silently, but I already knew them by heart. She whispered them quietly, as quietly as if she, Tanya Topolyova, were together with me, Yuri Barankin, on that distant star...



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